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DISCOURSES

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NOW FIRST DIGESTED INTO ONE CONTINUED SERIES,

AND FORMING A COMMENTARY

UPON EVERY BOOK OF

THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT;

TO WHICH IS ANNEXED,

AN IMPROVED EDITION OF A TRANSLATION OF

CLAUDE'S ESSAY ON THE COMPOSITION OF A SERMON.

IN TWENTY-ONE VOLUMES.

BY THE REV. CHARLES SIMEON, M.A.

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VOL. XI.

MATTHEW.

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M A T T H E W.

MCCLXXVIII.

THE IMPORT OF THE NAMES GIVEN TO CHRIST.

Matt. i. 21—23. *Thou shalt call his name Jesus : for He shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.*

THE dispensations of Providence are extremely dark and intricate : the things which appear most afflictive often prove to be the richest mercies that could have been vouchsafed to us. This was remarkably verified in the history before us. Joseph was espoused to a virgin of consummate piety ; but, before their nuptials, she proved to be in a state which gave him reason to suspect her fidelity. Desiring to exercise all the lenity which the case would admit of, he determined to put her away privily. How distressing must such an event have been to this holy man ! But God sent an angel to unfold to him the mystery, to declare the ends for which the child should be born, and to impose on the infant a name, that should mark his office in the world.

I. The appointment of the name—

God had often condescended to assign names to men—

[Sometimes he had made an alteration in their names^a; and sometimes totally changed them^b. Sometimes he had assigned a name before the child was conceived^c. In these

^a Abram and Sarai to Abraham and Sarah.

^b Jacob to Israel.

^c John, Luke i. 13.

things he always acted with unerring wisdom. When men have attempted to give significant appellations, they have only manifested how ignorant they were of futurity^d. But God sees all things from the beginning to the end. And his designation of Christ's name was a prognostic of his character.]

The appellation given to the Virgin's son was peculiarly suitable—

["Jesus" simply means *a Saviour*^e; and was a common name among the Jews. It was sometimes assigned to those who were great deliverers^f. It had been given in a peculiar manner to the son of Nun^g. He was eminently a Saviour, as leading the Israelites into the promised land, which Moses was not permitted to do^h. But Christ, whom he typified, is a far greater deliverer. He "does that for us which the law could not doⁱ." He leads the true Israel of God into the heavenly Canaan.]

So remarkable an event may justly lead us to inquire into,

II. The reason of that appointment—

Waving all other reasons, we notice two before us :

1. To fulfil a prophecy—

[Isaiah had foretold that the Messiah should be called Emmanuel^k. From the event it appears, that God did not intend this prophecy to have a *literal* accomplishment. We may expect however that *the spirit of it* should be accomplished. Now the name "Jesus" was in fact equivalent to Emmanuel. "Jesus" means "Divine Saviour;" and Emmanuel, God with us^l. *And the Evangelist himself tells us, that the imposition of THAT name was in order to the fulfilment of THIS prophecy*^m.]

2. To declare the infant's office and character—

[The virgin's child was to be the Saviour of the world. He was to save his people *by price*, and *by power*. They were

^d Eve named her first child "Cain," which signifies *getting* : thinking perhaps that she had now gotten the promised Seed : having probably soon discovered her mistake, she called her second son "Abel," which signifies *vanity*. But how misnamed were both ! *This* proved a martyr for his God ; and *that*, a murderer of his own brother.

^e Acts xiii. 23.

^f Neh. ix. 27.

^g Numb. xiii. 16. Which name is precisely the same with "Jesus," and is so translated, Acts vii. 45. and Heb. iv. 8.

^h Deut. i. 37, 38.

ⁱ Rom. viii. 3. Acts xiii. 39.

^k Isai. vii. 14.

^l See Bishop Pearson on the Creed, p. 70, 71.

^m Matt. i. 22, 23.

under sentence of eternal condemnation. His life was the ransom to be paid for their soulsⁿ. Hence they are called his purchased possession^o. They were also in bondage to sin and Satan^p. And he was to make them a peculiar people, zealous of good works^q. Yea, he was ultimately to place them beyond the reach of all the penalties and pollutions of sin. It was of importance that this great work should be represented in his very name. And the text informs us that the name was given him for this very purpose.]

III. The interest we should take in it—

[Surely most precious should the name of Jesus be to all his followers. What benefit can be bestowed like salvation from sin? A deliverance from *its dominion* is an unspeakable blessing. The godly desire it no less than deliverance from hell itself. Deliverance too from *its penalties* is an inconceivable mercy. O, how delightful is pardon *to a burthened conscience*! How sweet is a sense of God's favour *in a dying hour*! What joy must the glorified soul possess *in the day of judgment*! Yet Jesus has bought it all for us with his own most precious blood, and has bestowed it freely on all his faithful followers. He will impart it liberally to all who will believe on him. Is there not reason then for that divine anathema^r?—Will not the very stones cry out against those who refuse to praise him? Let Jesus then be precious to us all. Let us adopt the grateful strains of that sweet Psalmist of Israel^s.]

I cannot conclude without a short ADDRESS, to those who make this a season of carnal mirth—

[The great majority of Christians seem to think that *the incarnation of Christ* gives them a greater licence to commit sin. And this impious thought greatly aggravates their guilt. But what madness is it to imagine that they can ever be saved in such a state. If they could, the angel should have assigned a very different reason for the appointment of Jesus' name^t. In that case, Christ would have been a minister of sin. But who must not, with the Apostle, express his abhorrence of such a thought^u? Our Lord has plainly told us what shall ere long be his address to self-deceiving sinners^x.—Let us then improve the incarnation of Christ for the ends for which he came; and tremble lest we provoke *the Saviour* himself to become our inexorable *destroyer*.]

ⁿ Matt. xx. 28.

^o Eph. i. 14. See also 1 Cor. vi. 20. and 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

^p Luke xi. 21. 2 Tim. ii. 26.

^q Tit. ii. 14.

^r 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

^s Ps. ciii. 1—4.

^t He should rather have said, "He shall save his people *IN* their sins.

^u Gal. ii. 17.

^x Matt. vii. 23.

MCCLXXIX.

THE WISE MEN SEEKING CHRIST.

Matt. ii. 1, 2. *Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa, in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.*

THE humiliation of our blessed Lord was attended with many circumstances tending to counteract its influence on the minds of men. To see him born in a stable, and laid in a manger, was doubtless a stumbling-block in the way of many: but the sending of his forerunner John the Baptist—the announcing of his birth by the voice of angels—the restoration of a spirit of prophecy after an interval of four hundred years—and the pointing him out to the Eastern Magi by a new-created star—were abundantly sufficient to remove the offence which his apparent meanness might occasion. This last event, the visit of the Magi to him, will occupy our attention at this time. We shall,

I. Make some general observations upon the visit—

That we may not go forward without some kind of order, we shall notice,

1. Who they were—

[The term by which they are designated, means magicians. But we are not to understand by this, that they were persons practising enchantments; we are rather to conceive of them as philosophers, who were attentive observers of nature, and (probably) proficient in astronomy. They came from the East; but whether from Persia or Arabia, we cannot say. All that is affirmed of them more than this, is vain conjecture, or foolish superstition.]

2. How they came to think of the Lord Jesus Christ—

[God, who is sovereign in the distribution of his favours, chose them, as he did the shepherds, to be the objects of his peculiar favour. He sent a star, or meteor, to attract their attention; and then revealed to them, that the star was intended to announce to them the birth of Him who was to be the King

of the Jews. Whether they had heard of Balaam's prophecy, (that a star should come out of Jacob, and a sceptre rise out of Israel,) we do not know^a: (the expectation of a ruler to spring out of Israel was certainly far extended through the world:) but, however the first conjecture might arise in the minds of the Wise Men, they could have known nothing certain but from revelation.]

3. What means they used in order to find him out—

[Being informed of the design of the star, they proceeded to visit this new-born King, and to pay him their profoundest homage. They pursued their journey to Jerusalem, and began to inquire, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" But they could hear nothing respecting him: their inquiries tended only to spread consternation through the whole city. Herod was alarmed, lest his throne should be endangered; and the Jews were terrified, lest that suspicious and cruel tyrant should make this report an occasion of inflicting on them some heavy calamities. To get some light into the matter, Herod summoned a council of all the chief priests and scribes; and inquired of them where Christ should be born. They readily informed him, from the prophecies, that Bethlehem was the place destined to that honour. This information being given to the Wise Men, they instantly proceeded thither; and, as soon as they went forth, the star, which had at first appeared to them in the East, became visible to them again, and went and "stood over the very house where the young child was." God withheld the miraculous appearance of the star when it was not necessary; and renewed it only when it was wanted to confirm the faith of the Wise Men, (which the indifference of the Jews might have caused to waver,) and to point out infallibly the house where the child abode.]

4. How they conducted themselves towards him when they had found him—

[Filled with holy awe and reverence, they no sooner beheld him, than they prostrated themselves before him; and presented to him the offerings which they had brought with them for that purpose. It is possible, that their worship was only such as it was customary to pay to kings; and that their presents were only such as were the produce of their own country, without any thing mysterious in their import. Still, however, we read not of their paying any such regard to Herod; and therefore we may conclude, that at least they considered Jesus as excelling all other kings in dignity and glory.]

^a Numb. xxiv. 17.

We shall now,

II. Call your particular attention to the Wise Men—

They may be regarded by us in a three-fold view :

1. As witnesses to confirm our faith—

[Does the indifference of the Jews respecting their newborn King appear to weaken the evidence of his birth? Let us hear the testimony of the Magi respecting him: ‘ We beheld a new-formed star, and were instructed by Jehovah in the reason of its formation. We went to see the child whose birth it announced, and we saw him with our eyes, and paid to him the homage which was due from us. We know that we found the very child that was referred to, because that miraculous star pointed him out to us; and when we had honoured him to the best of our ability, Jehovah appeared to us again, revealed to us the purpose which Herod had conceived, and directed us to return to our own country without informing Herod, that so the parents of the child might have time to remove him to a land of safety.’

Must we not in all this acknowledge the hand of God? and would God thus set his seal to a falsehood, and thus countenance an impostor?]

2. As types to animate our hope—

[We are taught to believe that the day shall come, when all nations of the earth shall be converted to God, and the fullness of the Gentiles shall be brought into the Church of Christ. The conversion of these Wise Men was, as it were, the first fruits, which assure to us the complete harvest. Does the event appear incredible? It was no difficulty to God to convince, and encourage them: nor will it be difficult with him to effect the universal change, whenever his time is come. The same thing shall then take place on an extended scale^b; and “ the kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of the Lord and his Christ.”]

3. As patterns to direct our conduct—

[Much may we learn from those heathen philosophers. *First*, let us learn to improve our studies or pursuits, whatever they may be, for our spiritual advantage. Do we behold strange phenomena in nature? Let them lead us to the God of nature: and whatever light we obtain from him, let us use it as the means of obtaining more light.

Next, let us not regard any scoffs, or difficulties, or dangers, that we may have to encounter in the way of our duty. Doubtless, the sages found many obstacles in their way; but they persisted to the end; and never ceased from their labour, till

^b Isai. lx. 5, 6.

they had found Him whom they sought. Thus, let us resolutely seek the Lord Jesus, till we have found him. He is pointed out to us, not by a star, but by "the more sure word of the Gospel." True enough, we may inquire after him of many who might well be expected to give us all needful information; and, after all, find them even more ignorant than ourselves. Our very solicitude about him may even provoke their enmity; but we must go on without weariness, and without fear; and still prosecute our inquiries after him, till we can say, "I have found Him whom my soul loveth."

Lastly, having found Jesus, let us present to him all that we *are*, and all that we *have*. Let our body, soul, and spirit be consecrated to him. Let us confess him as "King of kings, and Lord of lords;" let us devote to him our silver and our gold: and let us glorify him with our body and our spirit, which are his. This is our reasonable service: and if we be backward to render it unto him, surely these heathen converts will rise up in judgment against us: for, if they so honoured him, when they saw him only as a babe, wrapt in swaddling-clothes, much more should we, who view him seated on his throne of glory.]

MCCLXXX.

THE JOY OF THE MAGI.

Matt. ii. 10. *And when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.*

IN so concise a history as that of our blessed Lord, the events of whose life and death were so numerous, that, if circumstantially related, they would occupy too many volumes to be read by the world at large, it must of necessity be found, that there is much omitted which we should have been glad to know. But the Scriptures were not written to gratify a vain curiosity: the inspired writers had a far higher object in view: they were content to record so much only as was necessary for our instruction, and to give us such brief hints as would set before our eyes one continuous and comprehensive whole. In the account of the wise men, who came from the East to worship the new-born Jesus, there is much left to mere conjecture. We know not who they were, nor whence they came, except that it was to the eastward of Judæa; nor how long it was after the birth of Christ; whether a few

weeks, or several months. What the star was, we know not. It could not be a common star; but only a meteor, resembling one. How they came to regard it as intimating the birth of any one, and especially of one who should be the King of the Jews, we know not. It is probable that they were astronomers; and that, seeing this new star over the land of Judæa, they concluded it to be ominous of some great event: and, having heard of the general report, that there was expected to arise, about that time, in Judæa, one who should govern the whole earth, they might suppose the star to be an indication of *his* birth. Yet, on the whole, I think it more probable, that the same Almighty and gracious God, who sent this star to guide them to Judæa, revealed to them the occasion of its appearance, and the wonderful event of which they themselves were to be the favoured witnesses. The inquiry which they make on reaching Jerusalem seems indeed to place this matter beyond a doubt: for they do not ask whether some great personage were born: they express no doubt whatever respecting the fact; but only inquire where the new-born infant was; “Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star, and are come to worship him.” The Jews themselves, it seems, were unconscious of any remarkable occurrence, till the confident inquiry of these strangers drew their attention to it: and then both Herod the king, and all the people at Jerusalem, were filled with consternation. Herod, a remarkably jealous prince, summoned the chiefs of the Jewish nation, that he might learn from them where their Messiah, according to the Scriptures, should be born. They, from a well-known prophecy, informed him, that Bethlehem was the highly-favoured city for which this honour was reserved: and he, on receiving this information, directed the Magi thither, with an express command, that, when they should have found him, they would come back to him, and communicate all that they should have learned respecting him. Thither the Magi now directed their steps. But no sooner had they re-commenced their journey,

than the star, which they had seen in the East, and which had for some time disappeared, came again; and guided them, not to the city only, but to the house where Jesus was; thus pointing out, with infallible precision, the very child whom they desired to find. On this occasion it is said, "When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy." Now, the terms in which their joy is here spoken of are so strong, as to be incapable of being translated literally into our language. Their general import, however, is sufficiently conveyed in the words before us: "They rejoiced with exceeding great joy."

In speaking of this their joy, we shall find it profitable to inquire, What it indicated in relation to them.

From this interesting portion of divine history we may learn,

I. The magnitude of the object which they pursued—

They sought to behold and to honour the new-born King. This was an object worthy of pursuit:

As viewed by them, it was of great moment—

[Supposing them only to conceive of him as born to a kingdom, yet, taking into consideration the miracle with which his birth was announced, and the prophetic declarations relative to the place of his birth, they might well regard him as worthy to be served and honoured. And in proportion as we suppose their views of his character and office to have been enlarged, the importance of their object must, of course, have been magnified in their minds.]

With the additional light which we enjoy, it was an object the most important that any creature could pursue—

[We know that infant to have been "Emmanuel, God with us." Yes, he was "God manifest in human flesh:" and not a king of one nation only, but of the whole earth, even "King of kings, and Lord of lords."

To behold HIM in this his humbled state; to worship HIM, and glorify HIM; what could the highest archangel desire more? This was an object worthy of ambition to every child of man: nor could any labour, any privation, any suffering, be too great to be encountered willingly, and sustained cheerfully, in the pursuit of it.]

In their labours, we behold also,

II. The ardour of mind with which it should be pursued—

Their journey, whether from Arabia or any other country, was long and arduous—

[Their setting out from their own country, and prosecuting their journey to Judæa, argued no little zeal: but to persevere when the star had disappeared, and when so much difficulty and uncertainty must, in all probability, attend their future exertions, required a zeal more than ordinarily intense and ardent: and we admire their steady perseverance in so great a work.]

What, then, should ever damp our ardour in the service of our Lord?

[Methinks, this is a labour in which our whole lives should be occupied. We need not, indeed, leave our homes in order to behold his face, since he is here in the midst of us: but we must be ready to part with all, if called to it: and, whatever difficulties may obstruct our way, we should determine, with God's help, to surmount them all — — — Nor should we take with us a portion only of our property; but go and offer to him all that we *are*, and all that we *have*. Our whole selves, body, soul, and spirit, must be consecrated to his service, that he may be glorified in all — — —]

In them we may yet further see,

III. The blessedness that shall crown our labours—

“They rejoiced with exceeding great joy”—

[They, even before they had fully attained their object, rejoiced: what joy, then, must have filled their souls, when they were introduced into the very presence of this infant, and had the honour of presenting to him their gifts of gold, and frankincense and myrrh!]

But the believer's joy at finding the Saviour, is incomparably more exalted—

[It is truly said to be a “joy unspeakable and glorified.” O how richly are the labours of a whole life repaid by one glimpse of the Saviour's glory! And what prospects does it open to him in the eternal world! — — — Truly, no language can express the joy that he feels, nor any heart conceive the blessedness that awaits him — — —]

ADDRESS—

1. The nominal Christian—

[Though not truly interested in the Saviour, you are highly privileged: because you have an infinitely better guide than ever the Magi had, even the word of God, which will be a light to your feet, and a lantern to your paths; and will infallibly, if duly followed, lead you to the Saviour's presence. Improve, then, your *privileges*; and let them remind you of your *obligations* also: for if your light be more clear than theirs, so should your surrender of yourselves to Christ be more entire.]

2. The inquiring Christian—

[You, like the Magi, may feel discouragement in your journey heavenward; and, through the withdrawal of light from your soul, be ready to doubt whether you shall ever attain the object of your desires. But hold on, in the midst of all discouragements; and doubt not but that your labour shall be crowned with success at last: for God's promise to you is, "Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord. His goings forth are prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto you as the rain, as the former and as the latter rain upon the earth^a."]]

3. The assured Christian—

[You have found the Saviour, and presented yourselves to him. Now, then, shew yourselves worthy of this high privilege. A sad indifference exists in relation to him, even amongst those who from their office and their general information ought to be most forward in calling the attention of others to him. And, from the reports which we have of his reception in heathen lands, even amongst the most barbarous Africans and Hottentots, we may all blush for our coldness and ingratitude. However, if you have been led to the Saviour, take care to honour him in the midst of an ungodly world, and labour to make him known to all around you.]

^a Hos. vi. 3.

MCCLXXXI.

THE SLAUGHTER OF THE INFANTS.

Matt. ii. 16, 18. *Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and*

weeping, and great mourning; Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

WHILST ungodly men are perpetrating every species of wickedness, the language of their hearts, as interpreted by God himself, is this: "The Lord seeth us not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth^a." A similar thought is apt to arise in the heart, when our trials are multiplied, and relief is not speedily afforded us. It was in this way that the Israelites at Massah, when destitute of water, vented their murmurs: this was their atheistical inquiry; "Is the Lord amongst us or not^b?" Even godly persons, under violent temptation, are sometimes ready to ask, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" But a diligent attention to the Scriptures will fortify us against any such absurd conclusions. From them we shall learn, that however inattentive God may *appear* to be to the concerns of men, he directs, limits, and overrules all their actions, for the promotion of his own glory. Scarcely on any occasion should we have expected his interposition, more than for the prevention of that murderous edict, whereby all the infants of Bethlehem and the adjacent country were destroyed. Yet God saw fit to permit it; and interfered no further than was necessary for the fulfilling of his own word, and the accomplishing of his own eternal purpose.

Let us contemplate,

I. The fact recorded—

A more strange occurrence can scarcely be conceived. We wonder that any human being should be invested with such power, as to cause, by his own arbitrary mandate, the slaughter of so many innocent persons. We wonder still more, that, supposing this authority to be delegated to any one, there should be found agents to carry such an inhuman edict into execution. But most of all do we wonder, that a creature endued with reason should be capable of issuing such an order as Herod did on this occasion. But let us trace this action to its source: let us inquire

^a Ezek. viii. 12. and ix. 9. ^b Exod. vii. 7. ^c Ps. lxxvii. 9.

into the principle from which this unparalleled barbarity proceeded—

[The murderous purpose *originated in jealousy*. Herod possibly had heard of the birth of Jesus, previous to the arrival of the Wise Men: but *that* was the circumstance which put him upon making inquiries into the pretensions of this newborn infant. From them he learned, that a star or meteor had appeared to them in the East, and that they, either from revelation or from the traditionary prophecy of Balaam, had been led to interpret the appearance of that star as an intimation, that He who was to reign over the Jews was now born into the world. He was also informed by them, that they had come on purpose to pay him the homage which was due to such an exalted character. Upon this, Herod summoned all the chief priests and scribes, that he might learn from them what the prophets had declared respecting the place of their Messiah's nativity: and on understanding that Bethlehem was the place destined to that honour, he sent the Wise Men thither, and ordered them, when they had found the child, to come and give him information respecting him. This order he grounded upon a pretended desire to honour Christ; but with a secret determination to destroy him: for he concluded, that Christ was to have a temporal dominion; and that, if suffered to live, he would wrest the kingdom out of his hands. But such a rival he could not endure: and hence arose the secret purpose to destroy him.

But though jealousy first prompted him to form the murderous purpose, with respect to his supposed rival, it was *offended pride* that caused it to be extended to all the children around Bethlehem. The Wise Men, being warned by God of Herod's purpose, returned no more to him: at this Herod was indignant: he conceived himself slighted and despised; but he was determined not to be disappointed of his desire; and therefore, to secure his object, he gave orders that all infants near the age of Jesus, and within the neighbourhood of the place where he was born, should be massacred without distinction.

What an amazing ascendant must these principles have over the heart of man! Well may it be said, that "*jealousy is cruel as the grave*^d:" nor indeed is pride less cruel, when its wounded feelings have scope for exercise. This we see in the two sons of Jacob, who, on account of their sister having been defiled by the Prince of Shechem, slew every male in the city: and, when reproved for their cruelty, they shewed, in their vindication of themselves, from whence that cruelty had proceeded: "*Should he deal with our sister as with an harlot*^e?"

^d Cant. viii. 6.

^e Gen. xxxiv. 31.

Happy would it have been for the world, if such dispositions and conduct had been altogether banished by the Gospel of Christ: but the human heart is the same in every age and place: we still see that the love of power is a predominant principle in the mind of man; that where it is suffered to gain an ascendancy, it will leave no means untried for the accomplishment of its ends; and that, if the more lenient methods of deceit and treachery will not succeed, it will wade through seas of blood to the attainment of its object: the cries of thousands and tens of thousands will not divert it from its purpose: nor will any thing but the utter extinction of a rival satisfy its blood-thirsty appetite^f.

We must not however forget, that the same evil principles are in our own hearts: and, if we will only call to mind the irritation which we have felt on some particular occasions, we shall see reason to be thankful to God, who has kept us from carrying into execution all that our offended pride might have prompted us to effect.]

Before we proceed to make any practical remarks upon this fact, it will be proper to notice,

II. The prophecy accomplished by it—

The New Testament writers sometimes appeal to the prophecies of the Old Testament, as direct proofs of what they assert, and sometimes in a more lax way of accommodation only. It is in this latter way, we apprehend, that the prophecy before us is adduced^g? In its primary meaning, it represented the Jews as collected at Rama, for the purpose of being carried into captivity to Babylon^h; and Rachel (who had about eleven hundred years before been buried near that placeⁱ) as weeping over the disconsolate state of her posterity. The Evangelist beautifully applies the same figure to the slaughter of the children which took place at Bethlehem, which also was near to Rachel's tomb; and, in this view, he speaks of the prophecy as again accomplished. This he might well do: for who can conceive the distress which that event occasioned?

[The murderous bands could not stop to see, whether, in every instance, the wounds they had inflicted had actually

^f Written in Feb. 1809, when the British army had been forced to leave Spain under the merciless dominion of Buonaparte.

^g Jer. xxxi. 15—17.

^h Jer. xl. 1.

ⁱ Gen. xxxv. 19.

destroyed life: they must proceed rapidly in their work, lest any of the children should be carried off or concealed: and what anguish must the cries of so many children, (probably some thousands,) writhing in the agonies of death, in agonies protracted by the kind solicitude of their parents, have produced in the bosoms of their bereaved mothers! No language can paint, no imagination conceive, the horrors of that day. We may use the terms, "lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning;" but we cannot affix to them any adequate ideas, or realize, in any just degree, that awful scene — —]

We cannot but SEE from hence,

1. How early our Lord's sufferings began—

[Scarcely was he born, before his life was sought, and he was forced to be carried an exile to the country which of all others had been most hostile to his progenitors. And, after the death of Herod, he was forced, for his security, to take up his abode in a town which fixed a stigma upon him to his latest hour^k. These were, indeed, only "the beginnings of his sorrows:" but they may well reconcile his followers to any privations or reproaches which they may be called to endure for his sake. If for us he became "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief," let us cheerfully bear our cross for him, and willingly "suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together" — —]

2. How vain are any attempts of man to counteract the designs of God—

[Herod foolishly thought to defeat the purposes of heaven; but "God held him in derision, and laughed him to scorn^l." God knew his murderous plans, and warned the parents of our Lord to escape his fury; yea, and provided too for their journey and support in Egypt, by the offerings which the Wise Men had just before presented to the new-born King. Herod, to secure his purpose, ordered, not the children of Bethlehem only, but of all the neighbouring country; and not of one year old only, but all under two years old, to be massacred: but his attempts were vain; and instead of frustrating the designs of Heaven, he unwittingly fulfilled them; occasioning, by this very act, no less than three prophecies to be accomplished^m. Thus it is with all who set themselves against God: they may shew their malignity, but they cannot counteract his gracious designs. "Many are the devices in

^k John i. 46. and vii. 52.

^l Ps. ii. 1—6.

^m ver. 15, 17, 23. He still further confirmed the Messiahship of Jesus, by leading all the Jewish Sanhedrim to declare, that Bethlehem was to be the place of his nativity, ver. 4—6.

men's hearts; nevertheless, the counsel of the Lord, that shall standⁿ." "The wrath of man (as far as it is permitted to be exercised) shall praise him; and the remainder of that wrath shall he restrain^o." We never need, therefore, to be afraid of man; for, if we commit our way unto the Lord, "he will be our shield and buckler;" and, "if He be for us," we may triumphantly ask, "Who can be against us^p?"]

3. How certainly will there be a day of future retribution—

[Can it be, that such an inhuman monster should never meet with any just recompence for his deeds? The mind revolts at the idea. If there be a God that governs the world, there must be a period when the present inequalities of his government shall be done away, and the equity of his dispensations be made apparent. Hence the day of judgment is in Scripture called, "The day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God^q:" and we are told, that "it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble us: and to us who are troubled, rest^r." Let us then act in reference to that day: whether exalted and at ease, or depressed and persecuted, let us look to that day, when our happiness or misery shall be for ever fixed. Let us dread prosperity, if it divert our attention from a future state; and let us welcome adversity, if it be the means of bringing us nearer unto God. The infants now have no cause to regret that they were called to such early martyrdom: and it is highly probable, that many of their parents have since found reason to give thanks to God for the weight of sorrow that then oppressed them. But the proud oppressor,—who can reflect on his state without shuddering? how will he feel, when he shall stand at the tribunal of that very Jesus, whom, with such hypocrisy and cruelty, he laboured to destroy? O that, whenever tempted to sin, we may think of the account which *we* must one day give; and, whenever called to suffer, may "look with Moses to the recompence of the reward!"]

ⁿ Prov. xix. 21.

^o Ps. lxxvi. 10.

^p Rom. viii. 31.

^q Rom. ii. 5.

^r 2 Thess. i. 6, 7.

MCCLXXXII.

JOHN'S ADDRESS TO THOSE WHO CAME TO BE BAPTIZED
OF HIM.

Matt. iii. 7—10. *But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers! who hath warned you to flee from the wrath*

to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance : and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father : for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees : therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

WHEN a profession of religion is become fashionable, as it were, and common, it is necessary for ministers to be doubly careful that they do not sanction, much less promote, the delusions of hypocrites or impostors. At such seasons, peculiar faithfulness and discrimination will be wanted, that the upright may not be discountenanced, nor the vain pretenders to piety be encouraged.

The Baptist was signally successful in his ministrations, insomuch that Jerusalem, and all Judæa, and all the region round about Jordan, went to be baptized of him. Amongst this great multitude came many Pharisees and Sadducees, desiring to be numbered amongst his disciples. At this he was utterly astonished ; because the Pharisees were so conceited of their own goodness as to think that they needed no better religion ; and the Sadducees, the free-thinkers of the day, despised religion altogether. He would not immediately reject them, but, in a most faithful and energetic address, declared what they must be, if they would obtain happiness in the future world. He called them “ a generation of vipers,” because of the poisonous and infectious nature of their principles, and the manifest relation which, both in sentiment and conduct, they bare to the old serpent the devil^a. Such an address became him as a prophet^b ; but it would not be suited to us who bear an inferior commission. Nevertheless the same fidelity should be found in all : and what he spake to them, we must declare to you ; namely, that,

I. True religion must be judged of by its fruits—

^a John viii. 44.

^b Such were delivered by other prophets, Isai. i. 10 ; and by Christ himself, Matt. xxiii. 33.

As this is the only criterion whereby the excellence of a tree can be known, so is it the only true test of religion. There are “fruits meet for repentance;” fruits that manifest its existence, and denote its power. Let us inquire what they are: and, as they will be found in every part of our conduct, let us examine them in reference to,

1. God—

[It will certainly shew itself in high thoughts of God’s unbounded goodness and mercy; in deep humiliation of our souls before him; in a joyful acceptance of his proffered salvation; and in love, ardent love, to the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us; together with a simple reliance on his atoning sacrifice. It will stimulate the soul to fervent prayer for the continued influences of God’s Holy Spirit, and to a surrender of the soul, with all its faculties and powers, to his service. It will make the pleasing of God to be henceforth the great object of our lives; and will moderate all our regards to the creature, insomuch that, though we are *in* the world, we shall not be *of* it; and, though “we use it, we shall not abuse it.”]

2. Our neighbour—

[Repentance extends not to the sins of the first table only, but to those of the second table also. It will give a new principle to us in all our dealings with mankind. We shall be strictly just and honest in all our transactions, doing to others precisely as, in a change of circumstances, we should think it right for them to do to us. If a man be our superior, we shall be ready to pay him, for God’s sake, all that respect and obedience which the laws of God or man enjoin. If he be our inferior, we shall act towards him with all kindness and condescension, all tenderness and love. Whatever be his state and condition, we shall be cautious of grieving him by word or deed; we shall applaud his virtues, conceal his faults, and exercise towards him that forbearance and forgiveness which we ourselves desire to meet with at the hands of God. It will be the joy of our hearts to alleviate his troubles, to supply his necessities, and to seek his welfare, not only as well as, but even *in preference to*, our own^c.]

3. Ourselves—

[The office of repentance in regulating the secret dispositions of our hearts, is by no means sufficiently considered: but, if it extend not to these, it is not genuine, nor will it ever prove “a repentance to salvation.” In the natural and unrenewed

^c 1 Cor. xiii. 4—7. Phil. ii. 4. 1 Cor. x. 24.

heart, pride, envy, malice, wrath, discontent, uncleanness, lasciviousness, and many other hateful evils, are harboured, even where the external and visible exercise of them is restrained. But the true penitent "puts away all these," and and cultivates a spirit of meekness and gentleness, of love and kindness, of patience and thankfulness; and endeavours to guard against an impure thought or desire, no less than against the most criminal indulgence.

I do not say, that a penitent so attains all these graces as never to betray his weakness; but this I say, that these are the fruits of the Spirit which every penitent will produce^d; that they necessarily arise out of godly sorrow^e; and that every sincere penitent will advance in these attainments, so that they who are most conversant with him shall be constrained to bear testimony to the progressive amelioration of all his tempers.

O that there might be in all of us such an heart; and that all who profess repentance might thus make their profiting to appear!]

It is of infinite importance to ascertain in this way whether our religion be genuine; for,

II. Without it, all hopes of salvation are delusive—

The Jews were apt to found their hopes of mercy on their relation to Abraham—

[Many of them had a strange conceit that no child of Abraham could perish: and it is probable that they built that notion on the promise of God never to cast off *the seed* of Abraham^f. They had no idea that there was such a thing as a *spiritual* seed; and therefore they limited the promise to his descendants according to the flesh, and included all of them without any regard to their moral character. Against this erroneous notion the Baptist cautioned those whom he now addressed; and told them, that God would rather raise up a posterity to Abraham out of the very stones, (or perhaps from among the Gentile soldiers, many of whom might be present with them on that occasion,) than either suffer his promise to fail, or admit impenitent sinners to heaven.]

And similar to this are the delusions which obtain amongst us—

[Because men have been born of Christian parents, and educated in a Christian land, and have never formally renounced Christianity, they imagine that they are Christians, notwithstanding they have never cordially embraced the doctrines of Christianity, nor obeyed its precepts. They have the

^d Gal. v. 22, 23. ^e 2 Cor. vii. 10, 11. ^f Jer. xxxi. 35—37.

same reason for being Christians that Mahometans have for being Mahometans, and no better. They have never seen the suitableness of Christianity to their wants, nor the sufficiency of it for their necessities: nor have they been concerned about it, any further than just to observe its outward forms. Yet on this the generality found their hopes of heaven. Whether they will express it in words or not, it is that which they “think to say *within themselves*.” But we must remind all such persons of the declaration of St. Paul, “that he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God^g.” It is not any external profession that will avail us in the day of judgment: we may have the sublimest knowledge, the strongest faith, the most ardent zeal, and the most unbounded liberality, and yet perish at last for want of that principle of love, which is the source and summit of all vital godliness^h. O that we may never deceive our own souls, nor rest in any thing short of “pure, practical, and undefiled religion!”]

Such indifference about true religion would not long exist, if men would but reflect, that,

III. There is a time shortly coming, when the want of it will be attended with the most bitter consequences.

God had determined to punish the Jewish nation for their unfruitfulness—

[Long had he waited to see whether the vines he had cultivated with so much care, would bring forth fruit: but they brought forth none but wild grapes: and therefore, though he had spared them long at the intercession of the vine-dresser, he determined speedily to cut them down, that they might cumber the ground no longer. Of this the Baptist warned his audience: he assured them, that God was ready to execute his purpose; that “the axe was even now *lying at*ⁱ their roots;” and that nothing but immediate and true repentance could avert their doom.]

The same awful judgment awaits every unfruitful soul—

[An unfruitful tree stands unconscious of the destiny that awaits it: but they who see the preparations made for cutting it down, anticipate its fate. Thus, if impenitent transgressors had eyes to see, they might see the axe lying at their root, and

^g Rom. ii. 28, 29.

^h 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.

ⁱ *Κεῖται πρὸς*.

God giving his orders to him that is to use it. Disease or accident are just tarrying awhile, but coming at the appointed moment, to execute their commission.

And here let it be remembered, that it is not a mere negative goodness that will obtain a respite. It is not said, that every tree which brings forth *peculiarly bad* fruit, shall be cut down; but every tree which bringeth not forth *good* fruit. There must be such fruits as we have before spoken of; such as characterize a converted state; such as are "meet for" and "worthy of" true repentance. As the "unprofitable servant" is numbered with those who are positively "wicked," so the unfruitful tree will receive the same doom as that which is laden with the most pernicious fruits. And happy would it be for such professors of religion, if they had only temporal judgments to expect: but there remains for them a fire, after they are cut down; a fire into which they will be cast, and which, though incessantly consuming them, will never be extinguished.]

ADDRESS—

1. Guard against delusive expectations—

[Every person, whatever may have been his life, hopes to be happy in a future world. The vanity of such hopes is in many cases so manifest, that we cannot but pity the self-deluding people who cherish them. Yet, though we can see the delusions of others, we cannot see our own: we all hope that *our own* state is safe: "a deceived heart turns us aside, so that we cannot deliver our souls, or say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?" The Pharisees had a high conceit of their own comparative sanctity, as the Sadducees had of their superior wisdom: and though each condemned the other, neither would condemn themselves. But John saw that neither the one nor the other would ultimately attain salvation, unless they experienced an entire change both of heart and life. They however would not believe him, and therefore rejected the counsel of God, which the more humble publicans thankfully embraced^k. Let me guard you then against their mistakes; and entreat you all, however wise or good you may conceive yourselves to be, to entertain a godly jealousy respecting your state: and be fearful, lest by building your hopes upon the sand, you then begin to find your error when it is beyond a remedy.]

2. Be thankful to those who will shew you your true character.

[Those ministers who commend themselves most faithfully to your consciences, deserve your thanks. Many are the

^k. Luke vii. 29, 30.

reproaches which they bear on account of their fidelity; but a hope of benefiting your souls emboldens them to proceed; and they account themselves richly recompensed, when they see you bringing forth fruits meet for repentance. Do not then be angry with them for speaking plainly and pointedly, as the Pharisees were when they saw that our Lord had spoken a parable against them¹; but rather take occasion, from what they say, to search and examine your own hearts with sincerity and diligence, desiring and determining, with God's help, to know the worst of yourselves.

You will do well also to encourage your friends to communicate to you freely what they see amiss. You cannot but know, that if a skilful lawyer were to point out to you a flaw in the title of an estate which you were about to purchase, you would feel greatly indebted to him: and why? Because you would save your *money*. And will you not be thankful to one who by his counsel endeavours to save your *soul*? Alas! alas! to flatterers we can listen without weariness; but to a faithful monitor we can scarcely for a few minutes lend an ear: what the one says is received gladly, even though we have every reason to believe that he goes beyond the truth: but what the other says, calls forth all our ingenuity to weaken its force, though we know every syllable of it to be true. Beloved, be on your guard against this self-love: you may easily deceive yourselves, but you cannot deceive your God.]

3. Let nothing retard you in fleeing from the wrath to come—

[There is no room to ask, “Who hath warned you?” for I have warned you; and God has warned you; and, I hope, your own consciences have warned you: or, if none of these have spoken yet so as to attract your attention, I now warn you, with all plainness and faithfulness, to “flee from the wrath to come.” Consider whose wrath it is: it is the wrath of Almighty God. Consider the description given of it: it is, and ever will be, the wrath *to come*: yes, many millions of years hence, it will be no nearer its termination than at this moment: to all eternity it will be the same, The wrath *to come*. Can you reflect on the greatness and duration of this wrath, and not be diligent in fleeing from it? What other work can you have to do that is of the least importance when compared with this? Would the man-slayer loiter, when he saw the pursuer of blood just ready to overtake him? Do *ye* then use all diligence: leave nothing till to-morrow that can be done to day. I would lay hold of your hand, as the angels did of Lot and his daughters, and hasten your steps. Stop not

¹ Luke xx. 19.

even to look behind you; but “what your hand findeth to do, do it with all your might.” The Saviour is ready to receive you: he will cast out none that come unto him: and the express promise of your God is this, “Repent, and turn from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin^m.”]

^m Ezek. xviii. 30.

MCCLXXXIII.

THE BAPTISM OF THE SPIRIT.

Matt. iii. 11. *I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.*

IT is ignorantly imagined, that they who are most enlightened with the knowledge of Christ, and are most zealous in bringing others to an acquaintance with him, must of necessity be puffed up with pride, and be filled with a high conceit of their superiority to others. But none ever surpassed the Apostle Paul either in zeal or knowledge; yet none ever manifested more deep humility, since language could not even afford him words whereby sufficiently to express the low sense he had of himself before God: he calls himself “less than the least of all saints.” Another eminent example of humility is exhibited in the conduct of John the Baptist, who, though faithful in the highest degree as a preacher of righteousness, never sought his own glory, but invariably directed the eyes of his followers to Christ, in comparison of whom he accounted himself unworthy of the smallest regard. His expressions before us lead us to consider,

I. The transcendent dignity of Christ—

Christ, in a civil view, was not at all superior to John, yea, perhaps inferior, inasmuch as the son of a carpenter might be reckoned inferior in rank to the son of a priest: nevertheless he was, in other points of view, infinitely superior:

1. In his person—

[The person of John might well be considered as dignified in no common degree. He was the subject of prophecy many hundred years before he came into the world^a: his formation in the womb was announced by an angel from heaven, and that too at a period when his parents, according to the common course of nature, could entertain no hope of having any progeny. He was filled with the Holy Ghost even from his very birth; and was ushered into the world with the restoration of prophecy, after that gift had been withdrawn from the church almost four hundred years. But in all these respects Christ was far greater than he: Christ had been the subject of prophecy from the very foundation of the world: his work and offices had been exhibited to the world in numberless types and prophecies during the space of four thousand years. His body was formed, not merely in a preternatural, but in a supernatural way, by the immediate agency of the Holy Ghost, who created it in the womb of a virgin; by which means he was not merely holy, but spotless, without the smallest taint of that corruption, which every child of Adam inherits. Without noticing the songs with which the heavenly choir celebrated the tidings of his birth, or any of those miraculous circumstances which pointed him out to the Eastern Magi, we see already how far superior he was to John, even in those things wherein John surpassed all other men.]

But what must we say, when to this we add, that he was God, "God manifest in the flesh," "God over all, blessed for ever?" Then all comparison must cease: and the expressions used by John, instead of appearing exaggerated, will be acknowledged to be infinitely below the truth: though the loosing of the sandals, and carrying them to the bath, was deemed too mean an employment for a Hebrew servant, or for any but a slave^b, yet John accounted it far too high an honour for him to render such a service to that glorious person, whose advent he announced.]

2. In his office —

[John was a prophet of the most high God, yea, "more than a prophet." He had the distinguished honour of being the forerunner of the Messiah, who should prepare his way, and point him out to the people, being himself divinely instructed how to distinguish him from all others who should attend his ministrations. Hence our Lord himself declares respecting him, that there "never had been a greater person born of woman than John the Baptist;" but glorious as he was, Jesus far excelled him in glory. Jesus was *the* great prophet, to whom Moses and all the prophets gave testimony,

^a Isai. xl. 3. Mal. iii. 1.

^b See Gill on the place.

and to whose directions all were commanded to submit. He was the Messiah himself, the very "Lamb of God that was to take away the sins of the world," of whom "John himself needed to be baptized," and by whom alone John himself could be saved. Surely then the words of John respecting him were not an unmeaning hyperbole, the offspring of affectation and the footstool of vanity, but they were the words of truth and soberness; for though John was like the morning star, yet he was altogether eclipsed as soon as ever the Sun of Righteousness arose.]

The superiority of Jesus will still further appear while we consider,

II. The baptism he administered—

Jesus never administered the baptism of water to any: but to him was committed the work of baptizing with the Holy Ghost—

[Though the Church had from the beginning received, in some measure, the communications of God's Spirit, yet, "till Christ was glorified, the Holy Ghost was not given" in a very general or abundant manner: it was reserved for Christ to send him down, in order that, through the Spirit's testimony, his own divine mission might be established beyond a possibility of doubt. Accordingly, a few days after his ascension, he fulfilled his promise, and sent down the Spirit upon his waiting disciples, causing it to rest upon them visibly, in the shape of cloven tongues of fire. And when, on another occasion, he poured out the Spirit upon Cornelius and his company, Peter particularly called to mind this declaration, which John the Baptist had made to the infant Church, and acknowledged it to be a glorious completion of his prophecy^c.]

This baptism infinitely surpassed that of John—

[John baptized with water those who were penitent, testifying to them that they should believe on him who was to come after him^d: but Jesus, by the baptism which he administers, makes men both penitent and believing. John, in applying water to the body, even if he had immersed his followers ten thousand times, could do no more than cleanse the outward body; he could not reach the mind; he could not affect the soul; he could not in any degree change the character of his disciples. But the Spirit, with which Jesus baptized, acted with the powerful energy of "fire." This was no sooner poured out than it penetrated the inmost recesses of the soul, and, like a furnace, purged away the dross which

^c Acts xi. 16.

^d Acts xix. 4.

was there concealed. What a change it effected in the characters of men may be seen by its operations on the day of Pentecost: how was the lion instantly transformed into a lamb! and how did the noxious qualities, which had so lately rendered men like incarnate fiends, immediately subside and disappear! And such are the effects which it invariably produces wheresoever it is bestowed.]

INFER—

1. How awfully are they mistaken who rest in the outward form of baptism!

[I would on no account depreciate baptism, or detract in the least from its importance. It is necessary for all who embrace the faith of Christ: and is replete with blessings to all who receive it aright. Even the outward ministration of it gives us a *title* to the blessings of the Christian covenant, exactly as circumcision gave to the Jews a *title* to “the adoption” of sons, and to “the promises” which God had made to his people^e. But if we receive it not aright, we are still, like Simon Magus, “in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity^f.” To receive any *saving* benefit (for, if it be rightly received, “baptism does save us^g”) we must have not only *the sign*, but *the thing signified*, a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness; or, in other words, we must be “baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire.” For the truth of this I will even appeal to the consciences of the ungodly themselves. Who does not feel at times that he *needs* somewhat more than he has ever yet received, in order to fit him for death and judgment? There is in every man at times, I say, this conviction: and this which is so wanted, is the very gift which Christ alone can bestow, namely, the baptism of the Spirit, as contrasted with, and superadded to, the baptism of water: it is “the renewing of the Holy Ghost” superadded to “the washing of regeneration^h.” If we have received this spiritual baptism, it will infallibly discover itself by its effects upon our heart and life. “As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christⁱ,” seeking daily to be clothed with his righteousness, and to be transformed into his image. So also, if we have been “baptized by the Holy Spirit into one body,” with the holy Apostles and the primitive saints, we shall have been “made to drink into one spirit with them^k.” “Now it is easy to see whether such a change have been wrought upon our heart and life, by our being altogether like-minded with them: and I wish you all to judge yourselves, that you may not be judged of the Lord.”

^e Rom. ix. 4.

^h Tit. iii. 5.

^f Acts viii. 13, 18—23.

ⁱ Gal. iii. 27.

^g 1 Pet. iii. 21.

^k 1 Cor. xii. 13.

It is easy to put this off with a sneer: but we cannot change that declaration of God, that, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his¹;" or that, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God^m: and, if we will brave those explicit declarations, we shall find ere long, "whose word shall stand, whether ours or God's."]

2. What rich encouragement does the Gospel afford to drooping contrite souls!

[It is by the Gospel that Christ communicates this blessing to mankind. See this exemplified in the instance of Cornelius. Peter, in preaching to him, said, "To Christ give all the prophets witness, that whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." Then we are told, "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them that heard the wordⁿ." Now to you also do I make the same blessed declaration, that "all who believe in Christ shall be justified from all things." O that God might bear the same testimony to it at this time, by sending to you the Holy Ghost in rich abundance! What joy that event would occasion, you may see in the effect produced on all the college of Apostles at Jerusalem, at the recital of it in reference to Cornelius: "They glorified God, saying, Then hath God unto the Gentiles granted repentance unto life^o." Yes, my dear brethren, "Repentance," "repentance unto life," would infallibly accompany the gift of the Holy Spirit to your souls. And is not that worth seeking? You are sure to repent sooner or later: and how much better is it to repent on earth, than to repent in hell; to have "repentance unto life," than "repentance that shall be eternally to be repented of!" Go then to the Lord Jesus for this heavenly baptism. The baptism of water you are to receive but once: but the baptism of the Spirit you are to be receiving every day and hour. St. Paul speaks of "supplies of the Spirit of Jesus Christ^p," which you are to be continually receiving: and *it is the very office of Christ to impart them to you*. The Lord grant, that you may all now "be filled with the Spirit^q," and that, having him poured out abundantly upon you, you may possess also, in the richest abundance, all his attendant blessings both of grace and glory^r!

¹ Rom. viii. 9.

^o Acts xi. 15—18.

^r Tit. iii. 6, 7.

^m John iii. 5.

^p Phil. i. 19.

ⁿ Acts x. 43, 44.

^q Eph. v. 19.

MCCLXXXIV.

THE ISSUE OF THE FINAL JUDGMENT.

Matt. iii. 12. *Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.*

THE great duty of a Christian Minister is, to set forth the Lord Jesus Christ in all his characters, and to impress on the minds of all the necessity of believing in him for the salvation of their souls. But the view which we give of the Saviour should be altogether such as is exhibited in the Holy Scriptures. If, at one time, we represent him as a propitiation for sin, saying, with the Baptist, "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world;" or, at another time, exalt him as the Head of his Church, ready to "baptize men with the Holy Ghost and with fire;" we must not fail to proclaim him also as the Judge of quick and dead; and to declare, with the Baptist, that "his fan is in his hand, and that he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner: but that he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

This is a subject to which we cannot too often call your attention, seeing how deeply we are interested in,

I. The discrimination which will be made at the last day—

Men are here divided into two classes, under the images of "wheat and chaff"—

[These images are just: for though all men spring from one common root, yet is there a great difference between them: some, as righteous, resembling wheat; and others, as wicked, answering rather to the chaff.]

The righteous may fitly be considered as wheat: for they are solid in the whole of their experience: their repentance is deep and genuine: their faith is lively and operative: their self-dedication to God is uniform and entire. They have in themselves a real and intrinsic worth.

The wicked, on the contrary, whether they be merely nominal Christians or hypocritical professors, may well be compared to chaff: for they are light, unsubstantial, worthless.

They may, to a superficial observer, appear like solid grain: but they will not bear a scrutiny. Examine their repentance: it has no depth in it: they have never known what a broken and contrite spirit means. Examine their faith: it has nothing beyond a bare assent to certain truths: they have never fled to Christ, as the manslayer to a city of refuge: they have never been cut off from their old stock, and been grafted into Christ, as scions; and been made to live by him, as branches of the living vine: such "a life of faith on the Son of God" is altogether unknown to them. Examine their obedience too: it goes to externals only; whilst the heart, instead of being given to him, is set upon the things of time and sense. In a word, they may "have the form of godliness; but they have not the power:" they may "have a name to live; but they are really dead."]

In this world, however, they lie in one promiscuous mass—

[After that the corn is threshed, it lies on the floor, mixed together in one indiscriminate heap. Thus, in the house of God, persons of every character are assembled: nor is any man such a discernor of spirits, as that he can separate the evil from the good. The two are united in the same works of charity and beneficence; yea, and compose the members of the same family: they even join frequently in the same religious society; and sit down together, like Judas with the eleven, at the same supper of the Lord. This we are taught by the Lord Jesus Christ to expect, as long as we continue in the world: "the tares and the wheat grow together in the field;" nor is it in the power of man to separate them.]

But the Lord Jesus Christ, in the day of judgment, will discriminate infallibly between them—

[The husbandman, by the simple process of winnowing the corn, makes the wished-for separation. Thus, at the last day, the Lord Jesus Christ will "purge his floor;" yea, already is the fan in his hand, prepared for the work: and so perfect will the operation be, that not a single grain of wheat will be found among the chaff; nor the smallest atom of chaff be left among the wheat. The least and weakest of God's people are infallibly distinguished by him *here*; as it is said, "I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted with a sieve: yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth^a." And shall not the same care be taken by the Judge of quick and dead hereafter? On the other hand, "nothing that is unclean, or that defileth, shall enter

^a Amos ix. 9.

into the mansions of bliss^b; and therefore we are sure that no hypocrite can find admittance there. The distinction between the wheat and the chaff will be unerring and complete.]

Let us proceed to contemplate,

II. The final issue of it to the souls of men—

“The wheat will be treasured up in his garner”—

[The husbandman regards the wheat as the object for which he has laboured, and as the recompence of all his toils; and he considers it as a treasure whereby he is enriched. It is in this light that the Lord Jesus Christ regards his faithful and obedient people. When the separation of them shall be made, and he shall behold them all assembled in one vast body, with what delight will he view them! How will he call to mind his own labours and sufferings in their behalf! and how will “he be satisfied, when he sees in them the travail of his soul^c.” It was with a view to this, that “he endured the cross, and despised the shame,” when he was in this lower world: to “this joy” he had then respect^d; and no feeling of regret will occupy his mind, when he shall see their number, their safety, their felicity. And shall not the saints themselves rejoice, when they shall find themselves thus approved of their Lord, and have no more wintry blasts to menace, or noxious blights to endanger, their security? O, blessed day! The Lord prepare us for it, and grant us all to behold that day in peace!]

But “the chaff will be burned up with unquenchable fire”—

[The chaff, as being altogether worthless, was burned^e. And what other end can the wicked hope for in that day? Can they suppose, that, after all the labour that has been bestowed upon them, and bestowed in vain, they shall meet with the same favour as the grain by which the labourer’s toil has been repaid? Can it be hoped that there shall be no “difference put between those who have served their God, and those who serve him not?” No: for them is a fire prepared: and happy would it be for them if they might be consumed by it speedily, like chaff! but, though ever burning, they will never be consumed: they themselves will be as imperishable, as “the fire is unquenchable;” and to all eternity will they endure the justly-merited wrath of an avenging God. Then shall be fulfilled in them the prediction of the Prophet Malachi, “Behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven: and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be as stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith

^b Rev. xxi. 27. ^c Isai. liii. 11. ^d Heb. xii. 2. ^e Isai. v. 24.

the Lord of Hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch^f." "The worm," that is in their consciences, "shall never die; and the fire that shall torment them shall never be quenched^g."

SEE, then, Brethren,

1. What need there is to examine the real state of your souls—

[Nothing would be more easy than to ascertain this, if you would listen to the voice of conscience: but what a fearful thing will it be to dream of heaven, till you awake in hell! ^h]

2. What need there is to live in a preparation for the eternal world—

[Whilst you are here, your character may be changed, and your bliss secured: but in the grave there is no work," &c. As you are found in death, you will exist for ever.]

^f Mal. iv. 1.

^g Mark ix. 43—48.

^h Unfold the idea contained in Matt. vii. 22, 23.

MCCLXXXV.

FULFILLING ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Matt. iii. 15. *Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.*

TO consult, in difficult circumstances, the judgment of wise and good men, is doubtless very advisable: but to place implicit confidence in any is not expedient; since even the best of men may err. We have a very remarkable instance of the fallacy of human judgment, in the case of the Apostle Peter; who would have dissuaded the Lord Jesus from subjecting himself to those sufferings which were about to come upon him; and who, on account of the carnality of his sentiments, incurred the marked displeasure of his Lord^a. We do not impute any measure of such blame to John the Baptist, for the unwillingness he expressed to comply with the wishes of our Lord: for he was evidently under the influence of a most becoming spirit, and had good grounds for the advice he offered: but still he erred; and our blessed Lord overruled his objections, declaring, that the administration of

^a Matt. xvi. 21—23.

baptism to him at that time was a measure not only expedient, but necessary: for that "thus it became him to fulfil all righteousness."

The precise force of our Lord's assertion not being perfectly clear, I shall,

I. Confirm it as a truth, in relation to our Lord—

John, feeling his own utter unworthiness to administer baptism to our blessed Lord, and having in his mind a persuasion that, however needful baptism was for others, it could not be so for Jesus, declined to execute the office that was assigned him. And, so far as Jesus alone was concerned, the judgment of John was right: for the rite of baptism imported, that the person receiving that ordinance needed to be washed from sin, and to be regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and to be saved by the Messiah who should come. But Jesus had no sin to wash away, nor any need to be either regenerated or saved; and, consequently, he could have no need of this ordinance, which was intended to shadow forth, and to impart, those blessings unto men. Yet did our Lord say what was strictly true, when, in reference to this very ordinance, he spoke of the observance of it by himself as a necessary part of that righteousness which he had come to fulfil. It was so,

1. Because he stood in the place of sinners—

[The Lord Jesus Christ having undertaken the great work of our redemption, had "the iniquities of the whole world laid upon him; and therefore, as the representative of sinners, he needed all which was needed by those whom he undertook to save. Hence he had in his infancy submitted to circumcision, which was of precisely the same import as baptism. So, at the close of his ministry, he endured the full penalties of the broken law, suffering all that we deserved to suffer at the hands of a righteous and offended God. He needed not on his own account to drink this bitter cup: but, when he was found in the place of sinners, those sufferings could not be dispensed with. "Seeing, therefore, that the cup could not pass away from him," he drank it to the very dregs. Every part of his humiliation, from the first to the last, was necessary, for the full attainment of his end: and therefore baptism, as an essential part of that humiliation, was required by him,

in order to the completion of that righteousness which he had undertaken to fulfil.]

2. Because it became him to give his public attestation to the divine mission of John—

[John had been sent into the world as his forerunner, to announce his advent, and to call men's attention to him as the true Messiah^b. Moreover, John had been informed, that the person who was to sustain that high office should be made known to him by a visible descent of the Holy Ghost upon him^c: and this descent was to be at the time of our Saviour's baptism. Now, if Jesus had not submitted to the ordinance of baptism, the ends of John's mission would have been defeated. For Jesus was not personally known to John: and it was only by this miraculous effusion of the Holy Ghost upon him that he was to be distinguished: and, consequently, the plan which Jehovah had adopted for the manifestation of his Son would, so far as the Baptist's testimony was concerned, have been altogether frustrated. In order, therefore, that the mission of John might produce the effects proposed, Jesus overruled the objections of John, and received at his hands the ordinance which he was commissioned to administer.]

3. Because it was the appointed means of his own solemn consecration to God—

[There were two ways in which the Lord Jesus was to be consecrated to his office: the one was by an effusion of the Holy Ghost upon him (as the typical high priests were by a holy unction); and the other was by an audible voice from heaven, bearing testimony to him as the person sent of God to be the Saviour of the world. Now these two attestations from above were of vast importance, not only for the satisfaction of John, but also for the satisfaction of the whole world. Besides, this effusion of "the Spirit, which was given to him without measure^d," was given in order to qualify him, as it were, for the discharge of his high office. It had been said by the prophet, that God would "anoint him" to his office^e: and that there "should rest upon him a Spirit of wisdom and understanding, a Spirit of counsel and of might, a Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; and that God would make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord." Now though, as God, he possessed "all the fulness of the Godhead bodily^f," yet, as man, and as Mediator, he needed to be thus qualified by the gifts of the Holy Spirit: and therefore on this account, as well as for the reasons before mentioned, it was necessary he should comply with the ordinance that had

^b John i. 31.

^c John i. 29—33.

^d John iii. 34.

^e Isai. lxi. 1.

^f Isai. xi. 2, 3.

been enjoined, and not be diverted from his purpose by the well-meant, but mistaken, scruples of the Baptist. In truth, from the administration of this ordinance to him, and the consequent testimony borne to him by the Father and the Holy Spirit, we have an evidence of his Messiahship, which ought to carry conviction to every mind of man^g.]

Having explained our Lord's assertion, as referring personally to him, I shall,

II. Enforce it as a duty, in reference to ourselves—

When our Lord says, "It becometh *us* to fulfil all righteousness," we must consider the obligation as extending, of course, to every child of man. And certainly this obligation does attach to us,

1. As creatures of God—

[The whole intelligent creation are under obligation to serve and obey the Lord. Whether the command given them be moral, and necessarily arising from their relation to him, or merely positive, arising from the arbitrary appointment of heaven, it makes no difference: they are equally bound to fulfil whatever they know to be his will. Adam was as much bound to abstain from eating the forbidden fruit, as he was to love his God. And so it is with us: we must fulfil all righteousness: however humiliating the command be, or whatever our obedience may expose us to, we have no alternative: we must yield a cheerful and determined obedience to it. It was beyond measure humiliating to the Lord Jesus Christ to submit to a rite which made him appear to be a sinner like unto us, and gave reason to all around him to suppose that he needed a Saviour like unto us. Yet he regarded not what men might say or think respecting him: he determined to submit to the ordinance, and would not be dissuaded from his purpose. Thus men may think and say of us, that we are weak, enthusiastic, absurd: but we must know no authority but God's, and have no standard for our actions but his revealed will: and our determination, through grace, must be to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God^h."]]

2. As followers of Christ—

[Though the Lord Jesus Christ has purchased for us the remission of our sins, and we have been "baptized into his name for the remission of sinsⁱ," yet we are in no respect absolved from our obedience to God, nor is any one duty we owe to him in any measure relaxed. On the contrary, our

^g 2 Pet. i. 16—18.

^h Col. iv. 12.

ⁱ Luke iii. 3. with Acts xxii. 16.

obligations to holiness are, if possible, increased; since the very end of Christ's mediation was "to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works^k." Besides, he came to "set us an example, that we should follow his steps^l." Was "he then without sin; and was he without guile^m?" We should, as far as possible, resemble him; and neither do any thing, nor forbear any thing, but in perfect accordance with the commands of God. If we profess to belong to him, we must "walk in all things as he walkedⁿ."]]

3. As hoping for a testimony from God in the last day—

[We all of us look for a future judgment, wherein "the inmost counsels of our hearts will be made manifest," and "every man will be dealt with according to his works." Then will God bear witness to his faithful and obedient servants; saying, "Well done, good and faithful servants; enter ye into the joy of your Lord." But how can we hope for such a testimony from him, if we have any reserves in our obedience to him? How can he say, "This is a beloved son of mine, in whom I am well pleased," if he has seen in us any wilful departure from his ways? How can he acknowledge us as "Israelites indeed, if we have not been without guile?" Know then, my brethren, what your duty is, and how it must be performed, if ever you would be approved of your God in that day. Verily, "it becometh every one of us to fulfil all righteousness:" and if there be any reserve whatever in our minds, instead of being approved of God as his children, we shall be condemned by him as hypocrites. "A right hand or a right eye" that is retained contrary to his command will inevitably subject us to his everlasting displeasure. It will be to no purpose to say, that, whilst following our superiors in rank and learning, we concluded we were acting right: for "the rulers of the Jewish nation rejected the counsel of God against themselves, by refusing the baptism of John;" whilst the publicans and harlots availed themselves thankfully of the proffered benefit^o. And, if Christ himself thus withstood the current of public example in his day; and sanctioned, by his conduct, the more duteous deportment of the lower classes; so should we, unawed and uninfluenced by the whole world, determine, with God's help, to "follow the Lord fully," and to sanction nothing which God himself will not approve. We should prefer entering heaven with publicans and harlots, to the being excluded from it with the great and mighty of the earth. To the approbation of God alone should we look; and with the prospect of that we should be content.]]

^k Tit. ii. 14.

^l 1 Pet. ii. 21.

^m 1 Pet. ii. 22.

ⁿ 1 John ii. 6.

^o Luke vii. 29, 30. Matt. xxi. 31, 32.

MCCLXXXVI.

CHRIST'S TEMPTATION.

Matt. iv. 1. *Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.*

THE agency of Satan in the affairs of man cannot be doubted by any one who really believes the representations given us in the inspired volume. His great employment from the very first has been to seduce men to sin. And from the success which he obtained over our first parents in Paradise, he is said by our Lord to have been "a murderer from the beginning^a." Even our blessed Lord himself did he assault, in the hope of prevailing against him, and of thereby defeating the great ends and purposes for which he was sent into the world. This, in the counsels of the Most High, was permitted, in order that that great adversary of God and man, who had been the means of introducing sin into the world, might be himself confounded; and man, his wretched victim, be rescued from his dominion. I say, this conflict was permitted by God himself: for we are told in my text, that "Jesus was led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil."

To unfold to you this mysterious transaction, I shall,

I. Consider it in all its leading circumstances—

II. Shew what interest we have in it—

The *first* thing to be noticed is *the season* which Satan chose for making his assaults on our blessed Lord—

[It was, in part, a season of *peculiar elation*, and, in part a season of *more than ordinary depression*.]

Our Lord's Messiahship had just before been audibly attested by a voice from heaven; "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased^b." Now this would appear to *us* the most unfit season that could be imagined, since by such a testimony as had been given him, our Lord's mind, so to speak, would be doubly fortified against every temptation. But Satan knew, that exalted enjoyments are apt to put us off our guard; as David had evinced; "In my prosperity I said, I shall never

^a John viii. 44.

^b Matt. iii. 17.

be moved: Lord, by thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong^c." Accordingly he is wont to embrace all such opportunities of assaulting man. It was when Paul had been caught up into the third heavens, that Satan buffeted him with more than ordinary force^d. And he actually vanquished Peter immediately after the highest honour had been conferred upon him^e. It should seem that Satan particularly availed himself of the occasion now afforded him, because he founded his temptations upon the testimony itself: "If thou be the Son of God," do so and so.

To counterbalance this testimony, our Lord had now been left forty days without food: and consequently, it seemed as if he were neglected by his heavenly Father. Satan therefore took advantage of this circumstance to urge upon our Lord yet more strongly the expediency of dissipating without delay the doubt which the occasion suggested, and the expediency of giving to the world some satisfactory proof of his Messiahship. It was in the absence of her husband that he had prevailed against Eve; and he hoped to prevail against Jesus also, now that his heavenly Father had in appearance withdrawn himself from him. Thus, whether our Lord was in a state of light and joy, or of darkness and distress, Satan hoped to make his condition the means of forwarding the object which he had in view.]

The particular suggestions whereby Satan tempted our Lord must *next* be distinctly stated—

[The period allotted for this conflict being now come nearly to a close, Satan renewed with still greater energy the assaults which had more or less been made on our Lord during all the days of his temptation. He tempted our Lord, to a *distrustful questioning of his Father's care*. Both Moses and Elijah, the one the giver, and the other the restorer, of the law, had fasted forty days: and it seemed good to Almighty God, that Jesus, when introducing a new dispensation, should fast in like manner, and for the same period of time. But Satan strove to impress our Lord with the thought, that he was forsaken by his heavenly Father, and that it was therefore expedient for him to relieve his own wants, by "commanding the stones to be made bread." This, however, as casting a reflection on his heavenly Father, Jesus would on no account do. Indeed, without the Father's blessing, no such supply would be of any avail. *This* our Lord shewed from the Scriptures of truth, wherein it is said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of

^c Ps. xxx. 6, 7.

^d 2 Cor. xii. 7.

^e Matt. xvi. 17—19, 22, 23.

God^f," who alone can render any thing available for our real good.

Having failed in this, Satan urged him to an opposite extreme, even to a *presumptuous tempting of the Father's power*. He took our Lord, doubtless with his own concurrence, as one man would take another, to a pinnacle or battlement of the temple, and urged him, in proof of his Messiahship, to cast himself down from thence, which he told him he might safely do, because God, on whom he seemed so confidently to rely, had promised to "give his angels charge over him, that he should not dash his foot against a stone^g." But, in citing this Scripture, Satan withheld that part which restricted the promise to persons walking in the path of duty. For any person to expose himself to danger without necessity, in order to see whether God would preserve him from injury, would be the highest act of presumption. It would be, in fact, to tempt the Lord. And therefore our Lord repelled the temptation by adducing another passage of Scripture, more appositely and justly quoted, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God^h."

What Satan could not do by deceit he now endeavoured to effect by the greatness of his offers, whereby he would induce our Lord to an *idolatrous rejection of his Father's authority*. He took our Lord to an exceeding high mountain, and "shewed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them," most probably the kingdoms in and around Canaan, from whence the glory of all other kingdoms might be inferred; and promised to "give him all, if only he would fall down and worship himⁱ." This would have been, in fact, to renounce his heavenly Father, and to give to Satan the honour due to God alone. How offensive such a proposal must be to our blessed Lord, we may well conceive. But, though filled with indignation, our Lord still had recourse only to the written word for the repelling of this impious proposal, and, bidding him to depart, he gave him this as the rule to which every creature must adhere, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God; and him only shalt thou serve^k."]

The issue of these temptations comes now in the last place to be mentioned—

[*Satan, foiled, was obliged to leave the field.* He could not withstand the authoritative command of Jesus. Abashed and confounded, he, for the present, desisted from his enterprize. True, he departed only for a season, as the Evangelist informs us^l, and as the subsequent history of our Lord attests^m. But

^f ver. 4. with Deut. viii. 3. ^g ver. 6. with Ps. xci. 11, 12.

^h ver. 7. with Deut. vi. 16. ⁱ ver. 8, 9.

^k Deut. x. 20.

^l Luke iv. 13.

^m John xiv. 30.

on the present occasion the victory was gained by our blessed Lord; and, as I shall shew under my next head, immense advantage was obtained for the followers of Christ in all ages.

Now too, that evil spirit being vanquished, *other spirits came down from heaven to succour and congratulate our victorious Lord.* Whether they administered to his bodily wants, we are not informed: but they doubtless were God's messengers to him to console his fainting spirit, and to animate him to all future conflicts.]

We may now proceed to consider,

II. What interest we have in this mysterious occurrence—

The account here given us is of far greater importance than we in general are apt to imagine—

1. It is a record of what the Lord Jesus Christ has effected *for us*—

[Satan, by overcoming the first Adam, had caused him and all his posterity to be excluded from Paradise, and to be consigned over to the curse due to sin. But Christ, the second Adam, by vanquishing for us that great adversary, has reopened for us the gate of Paradise, and caused his holy angels not only to abstain from prohibiting our entrance with a sword of fireⁿ, but to aid us, and encourage us in our endeavours to regain the blessedness we have lost. From that time they have been “sent forth to minister unto the heirs of salvation^o, to uphold them under any difficulties to which they may be exposed in life, and to attend them in the hour of death for the purpose of bearing their departing spirits to the realms of bliss^p. We before mentioned that Satan left him but for a season. At a subsequent period, he returned again to the charge, attended with innumerable hosts, even with all “the powers of darkness^q.” Yea, and he prevailed to “bruise the heel” of our most adorable Lord. But our Lord “bruised his head^r,” and even “by death overcame him that had the power of death, that is, the devil^s,” yes, he then “spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them openly on his very cross^t,” and in his ascension, “led captivity itself captive^u,” thus “judging and condemning the Prince of this world^x,” and leaving us nothing but a vanquished enemy to contend with. To appreciate this mercy aright, we should look all around us, and see what evil that wicked fiend has occasioned to the whole human race from the very beginning of the world; and then look down

ⁿ Gen. iii. 24.

^o Heb. i. 14.

^p Luke xvi. 22.

^q Luke xxii. 53.

^r Gen. iii. 15.

^s Heb. ii. 14.

^t Col. ii. 15.

^u Eph. iv. 8.

^x John xvi. 11.

to the regions of the damned, to see what misery he has entailed on millions of immortal souls, and will entail on us also, if the Saviour make not his victories available for us. Surely in the contemplation of these things we cannot but feel thankful to our blessed Lord for having thus undertaken our cause, and by his victorious conflicts obtained for us a restoration to our forfeited inheritance.]

2. A pledge of what he will effect *in* us—

[There is a striking correspondence between the assaults which Satan made upon our Lord, and those which we also, each of us in our measure, have to contend with: for so saith the Scripture; “In all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren^y:” and “in all points he was tempted, even as we are^z.” In fact, the reason of his submitting to these trials was, that by means of them he might acquire a sympathy with us in our conflicts, and “being touched with the feeling of our infirmities,” attain both a disposition and ability to afford us the succour which we stand in need of^a. In our conflicts with the world, he bids us look to his victories over it as a *pledge of what he will vouchsafe to us*: “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world^b.” So, in like manner, he tells us that “the prince of this world is cast out^c,” and that, provided only we “resist him, he shall flee from us” also^d, and in due season “be bruised under our feet” for ever^e.

Let us not then be discouraged at the thought that “we have to wrestle, not with flesh and blood only, but with principalities and powers, and spiritual wickedness in high places^f,” for there is armour provided for us, even the very same that Jesus himself made use of: from the Holy Scriptures we may take, as it were, “the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit^g: and, fighting in the strength of the Lord Jesus, we shall be enabled to withstand all the powers of darkness, and stand victors over all^h. Yes, we shall rise superior to them all, even as Jesus Christ himself did, and, as assessors with him in judgment, shall unite with him in pronouncing the sentence which shall doom them all to that lake of fire into which they have in vain laboured to plunge our soulsⁱ.

Are any of you then under circumstances of temptation to *distrust*, as persons forsaken by the Lord? Know that “your God will never leave you nor forsake you^k.” If the vision tarry ever so long, wait for it: for it shall surely come, and not

^y Heb. ii. 17.

^z Heb. iv. 15.

^a Heb. ii. 18

^b John xvi. 33.

^c John xii. 31.

^d Jam. iv. 7.

^e Rom. xvi. 20.

^f Eph. vi. 12.

^g Eph. vi. 16, 17.

^h Eph. vi. 13.

ⁱ 1 Cor. vi. 3.

^k Heb. xiii. 5, 6.

tarry" one moment beyond the fittest time^l. If, on the other hand, you are tempted to *presumption*, and to run uncalled into scenes of bodily or moral danger, remember that, whatever stress you may lay on garbled extracts from God's word, you cannot hope to be preserved, except in the ways that God himself has prescribed. If, like Israel of old, you go against your enemies unsent, you shall, like them, assuredly, meet with a repulse^m. Finally, if, like Demas, you are tempted to *apostatize from God*, and to prefer the things of this world as your portion, reject the proposal with abhorrence, and, instead of yielding, like himⁿ, determine, through grace, to live only for Him, who lived and died for you.]

^l Hab. ii. 3.^m Deut. i. 42—44.ⁿ 2 Tim. iv. 10.

MCCLXXXVII.

THE CALL OF FOUR APOSTLES.

Matt. iv. 18—22. *And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon, called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him. And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets: and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.*

IT has pleased God on many occasions to give marks of his special approbation to persons while they were employed in their worldly callings. David was taken from his father's sheep-folds, when he was appointed to feed and govern the kingdom of Israel. The shepherds were watching over their flocks by night, when a choir of angels announced to them the Messiah's birth. And four of the Apostles were occupied in spreading, or in mending their nets, when the Lord Jesus selected them for his stated and most intimate attendants. We do not mean to say, that a discharge of earthly duties can *merit* any thing at the hand of God, or that he will have respect to it in that view: but certainly, to fulfil the duties of our respective stations is a service highly pleasing and acceptable unto God; nor are we ever more likely

to receive blessings from God, than when we are occupied in performing the offices which he himself has assigned us.

But it is not so much to the season when these Apostles were called, as to the call itself, that we now propose to direct your attention. For this end let us inquire,

I. How far the call given to them is applicable to us—

We must consider our Lord's address to them as relating, in part, to the high office to which he had destined them as his Apostles. The world at large were not called to renounce their worldly occupations, and become itinerant ministers of the word: on the contrary, the great body of Christians were repeatedly bidden to "abide in the calling wherein they were called," yea, "to abide therein with God." Thus far, therefore, the command given to them is not properly applicable to us. But, in part, the command referred to their general duty as Christians: and in that sense it is given to every one to whom the Gospel itself is sent. We may consider our Lord as at this moment addressing us, and requiring us,

1. To embrace his religion—

[We cannot follow Christ one single step, without first coming to him as the Saviour of the world. We must regard him as the true Messiah; we must view him as invested with all power in heaven and in earth, that he might redeem us to God by his blood, and deliver us by his almighty grace. We must consider him as having all fulness treasured up in him for us, that we may receive out of it, according to our respective necessities, "wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." It is not merely to *give an assent* to certain truths that we are called, but to *realize* them, and to *live upon* them. We must not merely acknowledge that Christ is "the way, the truth, and the life," and that "he has reconciled us to God by his blood," but we must determine, with the Apostle, to know nothing but Christ crucified, to trust in nothing but his righteousness, and to glory in nothing but his cross———]

2. To walk in his steps—

[Next to our believing in him is that obedience which we are to render to his commandments. If faith in him is the root, obedience to him is the fruit, which must immediately and

with increasing abundance, proceed from it. Our blessed Lord came, not only to save us by his meritorious death and passion, but, to “set us an example that we should follow his steps.” To follow him, therefore, we must “walk as he walked.” Behold his zeal for the glory of his God and Father; it even “consumed him,” so ardently did it burn within him: such should be our zeal also: it should be “our meat and drink to do our Father’s will.” Behold his humility^a, his self-denial^b, his meekness^c, his patience^d, his compassion^e, his love^f: in all of these we are to resemble him; and to be progressively “changed into his image from glory to glory by the Spirit of our God”———O that all who profess themselves his followers were more like Him in the whole of his spirit and temper! It is this that marks the Christian: all without this is hypocrisy and delusion.]

3. To devote ourselves openly to his service—

[It is well to be Christians in our secret chamber: but we must remember, that “our light is also to shine before men.” We must confess Christ before men: and if we are ashamed or afraid to do so, we cannot be his disciples. “With the heart man believeth unto righteousness; but with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” His name, his cause, his people are despised by an ungodly world: and we must share in their contempt: we must “follow him without the camp, bearing his reproach.” There is no occasion to affect singularity in trivial matters; (THAT should rather be avoided:) there are points enough of importance in which we must be singular; we cannot resemble him without being singular; because the ungodly world are as opposite to him as darkness is to light: of course, therefore, we must be “as lights in a dark place, as cities set upon a hill.” Nay, we are not to be contented with “abstaining from fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness; we are actively and boldly to reprove them;” and must shew ourselves on the Lord’s side; endeavouring to maintain his honour, and to advance his interests in the world———]

These are points of universal and unalterable importance: and *we* are required to follow Christ in these respects, no less than the Apostles themselves. *This* call, I say, is given equally to us; and it becomes us all to inquire,

II. In what manner we should obey it—

^a John xiii. 4, 5, 15. ^b Phil. ii. 5—8. ^c John xviii. 23.

^d Isai. l. 6. and liii. 7. and 1 Pet. ii. 21—23. ^e Luke xix. 41.

^f Eph. v. 1, 2.

We need only notice the conduct of these holy Apostles, and we shall be at no loss how to regulate our own. The command itself is plain; and we must obey it,

1. Instantly, without delay—

[We see not the smallest hesitation in any one of those whom Jesus called, in our text. Elsewhere we find that one expressed a wish “to go first and bid farewell” to his friends; and another desired to “go first and bury his father^g.” But there is no time for compliment on an occasion like this. The call of God is of paramount obligation: nothing is for a moment to interfere with our obedience to it. We know not but that it may be the last call we ever shall receive. The persons invited to the marriage supper wished to excuse themselves for that time; but they were never invited again: on the contrary, the founder of the feast resolved, that “no one of them should ever taste of his supper^h.” A similar resolution may at this very moment be formed by the Lord Jesus Christ, if we now refuse to become his followers. “His Spirit will not always strive with man.” There is “a day when the things which belong to our peace may be for ever hid from our eyes;” and our “God may swear in his wrath, that we shall never enter into his rest.” O that that day may never come with respect to us! O that we may not foolishly dream of “a more convenient season,” which shall never arrive! But let us “to-day, while it is called to-day,” comply with this divine call. Let us imitate the man after God’s own heart, whose experience is recorded in those memorable words, “I made haste, and delayed not, to keep thy commandments.”]

2. Fully, without reserve—

[Whilst some are wishing to defer their compliance with this command, others make exceptions against it in some particulars, and would gladly have it lowered to their taste and convenience. Thus it was with the Rich Youth, who, when required to “sell all and give it to the poor, and to look for his treasure in heaven,” accounted it a hard saying, and parted with Christ and heaven rather than with his wealth. “One thing he lacked;” and that one thing as effectually ruined him, as ten thousand would have done. O that we may learn from his fate, not to make any exceptions or reserves; but to “follow the Lord fully,” even as Caleb and as Joshua did! It was a great trial to Peter and Andrew to leave their nets; and to James and John to leave their father also: but the grace

^g Luke ix. 59—61.

^h Luke xiv. 18, 24.

of Christ was sufficient for them; and they willingly forsook all for him. Thus must we do: we must give a preferenceⁱ, a strong and decisive preference^k, to Christ, above all earthly relatives, or worldly possessions. We cannot now be called to *act* as Levi did; but the zeal of Levi must be in us^l, and all things, not excepting parents or life itself, must be hated in comparison of Christ^m. We are plainly warned respecting the terms on which alone our Lord will consider us as hisⁿ; and we must "count the cost," gladly parting with every thing, that we may obtain "the pearl of great price.]"

3. Perseveringly, without end—

[Religion is not for a day or a year, but for the whole of our lives. "Our hands being once put to the plough, we must look back no more:" God warns us, that, "if we draw back, his soul shall have no pleasure in us." "It is he who endures to the end, and he only, that shall be saved" at last. As for a temporary obedience to this command, it would be worse than a continued opposition to it: "It were better not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after knowing it, to depart from it." "The latter end of an apostate is worse than his beginning." We are particularly told to "remember Lot's wife," who was made an everlasting monument of his vengeance, not for *going* back to Sodom, but for *looking* back, and thereby shewing, that her heart was yet cleaving to the things which she had left behind. Happy will it be for us if we bear her in mind, and consider the danger of departing even in heart from the Lord — — — If our trials be multiplied, we must cry the more earnestly to God for help, that through his all-sufficient grace we may say with David, "All this has come upon us; yet is not our heart turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way^o."]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who think that such obedience is impracticable—

[See how powerfully the word of Christ wrought on them — — — It is no less powerful now — — — Pray that it may come to your hearts in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.]

2. Those who are hesitating whether to obey or not—

[If it appear formidable to you to *follow* Christ now, think what it will be to be bidden to *depart from* him hereafter — — — That you will meet with trials is certain: but

ⁱ Matt. x. 37, 38.

^k Luke xiv. 25—27, 33.

^l Deut. xxxiii. 9, 10.

^m Matt. xvi. 24, 25.

ⁿ Acts xx. 24. and xxi. 13. ^o Ps. xliv. 17—19. and cxix. 51 157.

your losses shall be repaid a hundredfold *in this life*, besides a proportionable weight of glory in the world to come^p. Thousands can attest the truth of this — — — O choose the better part, which shall never be taken away from you!]

3. Those who are engaged in following the Lord—

[Though you may not be called, *as preachers*, to be “fishers of men,” yet in your several stations God will make you instrumental to the salvation of men. A holy life will operate on many who would never have been wrought upon by the preached word^q. None prove such stumbling-blocks as you, if your lives be unsuitable to your profession, and none such blessings, if you walk worthy of your high calling — — — “Seek therefore more and more to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things^r.”]

^p Mark x. 28—30.

^q 1 Pet. iii. 1, 2.

^r Matt. v. 13. 2 Cor. iii. 2, 3. 1 Pet. ii. 12, 15.

MCCLXXXVIII.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE HUMBLE.

Matt. v. 1—4. *And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: and he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.*

THERE is no portion of the Holy Scriptures for which mankind at large express so great a reverence, as that which is called the Sermon on the Mount. Some exalt it in opposition to the rest of the sacred volume, and affirm, that we need not attend to any other part. This is certainly wrong, since every part of that blessed book is given by inspiration from God. On the other hand, there are some who would get rid of it altogether, by supposing that it was addressed to the Apostles only, and that common Christians have nothing to do with it. But these also do greatly err: for, not to mention that the Apostles were not yet chosen from among the disciples; the very declaration of St. Matthew, at the end of this discourse, shews that it was spoken to all the people^a. The multitudes

^a Matt. vii. 28.

being too numerous to be accommodated in any house or synagogue, our Lord went up into a mountain, and sat down after the custom of the Jewish teachers, in order to instruct them. Those disciples who were most eager for instruction, drew nigh unto him; whilst those who were more indifferent about it, contented themselves with remoter situations: but, for the benefit of all, “he opened his mouth” with peculiar solemnity, and taught them.

His design in this sermon, was to open to them the nature of that kingdom which he had before announced as about to be established, and to rescue the moral law from those false glosses which the Pharisees had put upon it. The people in general had an idea, that their Messiah should establish a temporal kingdom, under which they were to enjoy the highest privileges and blessings. To counteract this vain expectation, he tells them, that his subjects would be indeed most blessed; but that their character and blessedness were widely different from any thing that they supposed. They dreamed of riches and mirth; but the persons whom he pronounced blessed, were the poor and mournful.

To illustrate and confirm the declarations of our Lord, we shall inquire,

I. Who are depicted under these characters—

[Poverty of spirit, if viewed in all its extent, will include a variety of dispositions and feelings, which will more properly fall under our consideration in other parts of the Sermon on the Mount. On this account, we shall confine ourselves to one view of it, which, however, we consider as most appropriate and most important. It is thought by many, to import a disregard of riches and honours: but we consider it as designating a far more peculiar state of mind, not specified in any other part of this discourse^b. What poverty is, we need not be told. That man is poor who is destitute of all things needful for the body. From hence we may collect what poverty of spirit is: it is *a sense of utter want and helplessness in relation to the soul*.

All men by nature are poor, because they are destitute of

^b The parallel passage in Luke vi. 20, 21, 24, 25. cannot be understood of worldly poverty or sorrow, but of that which is spiritual.

every thing that is good — — — But many who are in this state, are far enough from poverty of spirit; they think they are “rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing” — — — When they are become poor in spirit they are of a very different mind; they know that “they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” They feel themselves altogether destitute of wisdom^c — — — goodness^d — — — strength^e — — — and every good thing^f — — —

Nearly allied to these are “they that mourn.” As poverty of spirit implies a sense of want and helplessness, so “mourning” implies *a sense of guilt and corruption*.

All men are guilty, and all corrupt — — — but, as in the former case, so in this, many are insensible of their state, and “think more highly of themselves than they ought to think.” Not so “the mourners in Zion:” they know their real character: they look back through their whole lives, and see that they have been altogether “alienated from God,” and have “lived without him in the world.” They see that their transgressions have been multiplied beyond the sands upon the sea-shore. They behold their iniquities set, as it were, in array against them; their rebellions against their God and Father — — — their contempt of Christ and his salvation — — — their resistance to all the motions of the Holy Spirit — — — the particular evils to which they have been more especially addicted — — — the evils that yet cleave to them, in spite of their better judgment, and repeated endeavours to cast them off — — — the mixture that there is in all their principles — the defect in all their duties — and the iniquity even of their holiest actions — and, in the view of all these things, “they groan, being burthened;” they “blush and are confounded;” they “abhor themselves in dust and ashes;” they cry day and night, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?” It appears to them a miracle of mercy, that they are out of hell; and *that* too, not only for the transgressions of their former lives, but for the opposition which their flesh, or corrupt nature, is daily and hourly making to “the spirit,” or heavenly principle, which has been imparted to them^g.

These two characters, “the poor in spirit,” and “the mourners,” though distinguished in the text, are so nearly allied, that they are united by the prophet Isaiah^h, and therefore are united by us. In fact, they are never separate: they

^c Job viii. 9. and xi. 12. They feel their want of spiritual discernment, 1 Cor. ii. 14. and pray, Ps. cxix. 18.

^d Job xl. 4. Isai. vi. 5. and lxiv. 6.

^e John xv. 5. 1 Cor. xii. 3. 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^f Rom. vii. 18. Isai. i. 6.

^g Gal. v. 17.

^h Isai. lxvi. 2.

always participate in each other's feelings, and always are subjects of the same blessedness.

Let us, in the next place, inquire,]

II. In what their blessedness consists—

Doubtless, to carnal eyes, there is little in such characters that can render them objects of envy : to a superficial observer, they appear rather to be in a most melancholy and pitiable condition. But they are truly blessed :

1. Their privileges are great—

[“The kingdom of heaven is theirs,” even that kingdom which Christ has established in the world, and maintains in the hearts of men. The blessings of that kingdom are precisely such as they want ; and they are in the very state to which all those blessings are promised. The Lord Jesus Christ has come into the world, in order to seek and save them that were lost. In him is treasured up all that they can desire. “He is wisdom” to the blind, “righteousness” to the guilty, “sanctification” to the polluted, “redemption” to the enslavedⁱ. He addresses himself to the very persons who are thus mourning over their blind, naked, destitute condition ; and bids them accept at his hands, “gold, that they may be enriched ; raiment, that they may be clothed ; and eye-salve, that they may see^k.” To feel and to lament their need of these things, is all the qualification that he requires for the reception of them. To those who are insensible of their need he will impart nothing ; but to the humble and contrite he will give more than they can either ask or think. Indeed the “kingdom of heaven” *is* theirs : they have not only *a title* to all its blessings, but *an earnest* of them already in their souls. Their poverty and contrition are *evidences* that the throne of Christ is already established in their hearts : and as certainly as they are made partakers of the kingdom of grace, so shall they in due time inherit the kingdom of glory.

And are not these persons justly called “happy^l?” Who are “happy, but they who have their unrighteousness forgiven, and their sin covered^m?” Who are happy, but they who have Christ for their friend, and heaven for their everlasting inheritance? — — —]

2. Their comforts are great also—

[Strange as it may appear, there is a comfort, an exceeding great comfort, in mourning for sin ; insomuch that the true

ⁱ 1 Cor. i. 30.

^l μακάριοι.

^k Rev. iii. 17, 18.

^m Ps. xxxii. 1, 2.

Christian reckons the seasons of his deepest humiliation among the happiest hours of his life. But view the penitent when applying to his soul the great and precious promises of the Gospel: feels he no comfort in this exercise? — — — View him when he obtains a glimpse of his Lord and Saviour, and a taste of his pardoning love: with what “unspeakable, and even glorified joy” is he filled! The admiration, the love, the gratitude which he feels on such occasions, sometimes overwhelm him; and he is silent, not for want of will, but for want of power, to declare what God has done for his soul — — — What views has he at times of that inheritance which is reserved for him! With what adoring thoughts does he contemplate it; with what ardent longings does he desire it; with what assured confidence does he expect it! — — — Yes, beloved; his poverty and mourning, so far from robbing him of these joys, are the means of obtaining, enhancing, and perpetuating them — — —

Tell me, then, whether these be not comforts far beyond all that the world can give? Yet these are but the beginnings of the Christian’s joy: for the cup which he but tastes of upon earth, he shall drink of to the full in heaven, where there are rivers of pleasure at God’s right hand for evermore.]

There are two descriptions of persons to whom we wish in few words to ADDRESS this subject:

1. To those who seek after happiness, but are not religious—

[How long shall it be ere ye shall be convinced of your error? Have ye not had ample proof that Solomon’s verdict respecting all worldly enjoyments is true? Have ye not found them to be “vanity and vexation of spirit?” Is there one amongst you that has found the creature to be any thing better than “a broken cistern?” We appeal to the aged, who have had leisure to reflect upon their past experience: we appeal even to the young in the midst of all their gaieties; have ye found in earthly things any solid and permanent satisfaction? have ye found a portion suited to the desires and capacities of your immortal souls? Go, ask the rich, the great, the gay, Are ye happy? They must all tell you, that “in the fulness of their sufficiency they are in straitsⁿ.” Know ye then, that “God is the only fountain of living water:” in Christ only can ye “find rest for your souls.” Continue to seek happiness in the world, and you will only treasure up sorrow and disappointment: begin to seek it in the exercises of religion, and you will soon find that “her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.”]

ⁿ Job xx. 22.

2. To those who seek after religion, but are not happy—

[Whence is this? Has our blessed Lord deceived us? Has he talked so much about the blessedness of being poor in spirit, and of mourning for sin, and is it all a delusion? No, surely: if you find not happiness in these exercises, it is because you do not engage in them aright. You either will not endure to think so meanly of yourselves as you ought, or you are making your own vileness a reason for distrusting the tender mercy of your God. The reverse of this must be your conduct. You must endeavour to get the most humiliating views of your own guilt and helplessness; and must make that a reason not for *staying away from* the Saviour, but for *going to* him. The more you feel your need of a physician, the more earnest you should be in your application to him; and the more will he be glorified in your salvation. Only follow his direction in going to him weary and heavy laden, and you shall soon experience the truth of his promise in finding rest unto your souls.

Peradventure there is some hidden abomination that you do not see, or will not part with. If so, it is no wonder that you are not happy: you may as well expect to be at ease whilst thorns are festering in your flesh, as to be happy while sin is harboured in your souls. But if it be indeed so, that you are upright before God, and are seeking the Saviour with true humility of mind, and yet, through the present clouds that encompass you, you are not happy, God directs you to “stay yourself on him,” and gives you this word for your encouragement, that “light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart:” it is sown, though at present it be under the clods; and in due time it shall assuredly spring up in your souls: your “heaviness may endure for a night; but joy shall come in the morning.”]

MCCLXXXIX.

CHRISTIAN MEEKNESS.

Matt. v. 5. *Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.*

WHILST it is acknowledged on all hands, that Christianity far surpasses all other religions in the sublimity of its doctrines, few are aware how much it excels them also in the purity of its precepts. But we need go no further than to the words before us,

to illustrate the superiority of the Christian code above all others. Whatever might assimilate us to ferocious beasts, has been a subject of praise among the heathen world. To contend with enemies, to revenge affronts, to be foremost in deeds of heroism, this has exalted men to deities: but to be of a meek and yielding spirit has been deemed rather an indication of weakness, and a reason for contempt. Yet this is the spirit which our blessed Lord particularly commands, and declares to be intimately connected with true happiness.

In vindication of his assertions, we propose to set before you,

I. The character here specified—

The disposition which distinguishes the persons here spoken of, is not that natural mildness and gentleness with which some are favoured even from the womb: (persons of this description may be as far from true Christian meekness, as others who are of a more violent temper:) but a meekness founded “in poverty of spirit,” and in “mourning for sin,” a fruit of the operation of the Spirit of God upon the soul^a. To view the Christian in the exercise of this grace, let us look at him,

1. In his conduct towards God—

[He no longer, like others, disputes against the *word* of God, or murmurs on account of the dealings of his *Providence*. Whatever God requires, appears, in his eyes, to be right^b: and whatever HE does, though for the present it may be dark and inexplicable, is considered as wise and good. He dares not on any account to “reply against God^c.” Instead of objecting to any declaration, command, or threatening, as “an hard saying,” he “trembles at it^d,” and receives it with meekness as an engrafted word, “able to save his soul^e.” He may have many and great trials; but instead of “fretting against the Lord,” he bows with humble submission, saying, “Not my will, but thine be done.” “He is dumb, and openeth not his mouth,” from the consideration that it is done by a loving and gracious Father^f.]

2. In his conduct towards men—

^a Gal. v. 22, 23.

^b Ps. cxix. 128.

^c Rom. ix. 20.

^d Isai. lxvi. 2.

^e Jam. i. 21.

^f Ps. xxxix. 9.

[He is *courteous*. If in his unconverted state he has been rough, severe, and harsh, he will not appear to the same advantage as one whose temper and habits have been mild: but the operation of divine grace will be more conspicuous in him, by reason of the greatness of the change that has been produced. He is become a new man: all around him discern and feel the difference: as a husband, he is more tender; as a father, more kind; as a master, more gentle; as a member of society, more engaging. He is modest, affable, easy of access, and amiable in the whole of his deportment. There is nothing of an overbearing disposition in him, but a willingness that others should think and act for themselves as well as he. This is his character, as described by the pen of an inspired writer: he is “no brawler, but gentle, shewing all meekness to all men^g.”

He is *patient*. Many in their natural state are so irritable, that it is impossible to please them long together: they are like the sea, tossed and agitated by every breath of wind. Not so the person who has attained the character in the text. We say not, that he *never* speaks unadvisedly with his lips; for even Moses, the meekest of the human race, transgressed in this particular^h; and, if a man so bridled his tongue, as never in any instance to offend in word, he would be altogether perfectⁱ. But the Christian has attained such a measure of self-government, as “not to be easily provoked.” He is “slow to wrath, knowing that the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God^k.” He accounts it “his glory to pass over a transgression^l.” Where the offence committed is of such a nature as to require an expression of his displeasure, he endeavours so to guard his anger, so to temper it with love and pity; and so to restrain it both in measure and duration, that he may fulfil the precept, “Be angry, and sin not^m.” He is particularly on his guard in relation to religious controversy. If his sentiments are represented as erroneous and absurd, instead of yielding immediately to vehemence and invective, he will “give a reason of the hope that is in him with meekness and fearⁿ,” and will “instruct in meekness them that oppose themselves, if God peradventure may give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth^o.” If, on the other hand, it falls to his lot to reprove a fallen brother, he will endeavour to “restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering himself, lest he also be tempted^p.”

He is *forgiving*. He may receive injuries like other men: but he will not resent them as others do. He knows that he

^g Tit. iii. 2.

^k Jam. i. 19, 20.

ⁿ 1 Pet. iii. 15.

^h Ps. cvi. 33.

^l Prov. xix. 11.

^o 2 Tim. ii. 25.

ⁱ Jam. iii. 2.

^m Eph. iv. 26, 27.

^p Gal. vi. 1.

is "not to recompense evil for evil unto any man," but rather to "heap coals of fire on the head of his enemies," if by any means he may at last melt them into love: "instead of being overcome of evil, he strives with all his might to overcome evil with good^a." The rule to which he endeavours to conform, is that which is laid down by our blessed Lord; (and who might so well require it of us, seeing that he himself exemplifies it so wonderfully towards all his people?) it is that of forgiving, not once, or seven times merely, but seventy times seven^r. In this indeed he labours to resemble Christ himself, "forbearing and forgiving others, even as Christ hath forgiven him^s." He does not, it is true, receive to his bosom a person who is so constantly offending; nor is it necessary that he should, till the person himself be renewed in the spirit of his mind: but he will so far forgive, as to bear not the smallest ill-will towards him, but to be really glad of any opportunity to do him good.]

Such, though in different degrees, is the true Christian. All do not attain the same eminence in these virtues; but all are distinguished for them in proportion to the grace they have received; nor can any man be accounted a true Christian, unless he have "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price^t."

If such a man is distinguished in the character he sustains, he is no less so in,

II. The blessedness he enjoys—

The New Testament encourages us principally by a hope of spiritual blessings: yet it sometimes gives us reason to expect also such as are temporal^u. That the promise here given to the meek is temporal, appears from the passage in the Psalms, from whence it is quoted^x: and it is indeed fulfilled to every one that answers to the character in the text.

1. He has fewer occasions of disquietude than others—

[Others, in addition to the common calamities of life, create trouble to themselves by their ungoverned tempers. When all would be peaceable and tranquil, they by their "grievous words stir up anger^y." As, to a man in a fever,

^a Rom. xii. 17—21.

^r Matt. xviii. 21, 22. ^s Col. iii. 13.

^t 1 Pet. iii. 4.

^u 1 Tim. iv. 8. Matt. vi. 33.

^x Ps. xxxvii. 11.

^y Prov. xv. 1.

every posture is uneasy, every food insipid, every office troublesome; so, to an impatient fretful man, every thing becomes a source of trouble and vexation. Both the one and the other are ready to think that people are in league, as it were, against them: but the disease is within themselves; and it is the soreness of their own flesh, not the hardness of the touch, that is in reality the source of their pain. But the man that is truly meek, cuts off, instead of multiplying, occasions of pain. By kindness and courtesy he disarms his adversary; and “by his soft words, he turneth away wrath^z.” If he has himself inadvertently done wrong, he freely acknowledges his fault; and thus, by yielding, pacifieth even great offences^a. If he have received an injury, the same disposition leads him to accept an acknowledgment, and not to insist on all the reparation which perhaps he might be justified in requiring. In many cases, he turns away his eyes from the evil that is done, and lets it pass unnoticed. In this manner he is kept from a thousand disputes which agitate others, and passes through life with half the troubles that vex and harass the world around him.]

2. He is less affected by those which do occur—

[The sturdy oak has often its branches broken off by a storm, or perhaps is torn up by the roots, whilst the supple reed sustains no injury at all. Thus the meek submissive Christian bears up under those trials which the stoutest of ungodly men would be unable to endure. He receives them as from the hand of God, and says, “Shall a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins^b?” “I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him^c.” Even when men are the immediate causes of his troubles, he still looks, through the second causes, unto God the first cause of all; and says with Job, “The *Lord* gave, and the *Lord* hath taken away; blessed is the name of the Lord^d!” How different is the state of such a man from one, who, “like a wild bull in a net,” foams and bellows with impotent unavailing rage! The world is not like the same place to the two characters: to the one it is as the confines of hell; to the other, the portico of heaven.]

3. He is more tranquil in his own mind—

[This necessarily arises from the two preceding considerations: but it is true in another point of view: the meek person has the testimony of a good conscience, and enjoys the presence of his God; whilst those who are destitute of that

^z Prov. xv. 1.

^a Eccl. x. 4.

^b Lam. iii. 39.

^c Mic. vii. 9.

^d Job i. 15, 17, 21.

holy disposition, are of necessity unacquainted with these sources of heavenly consolation. As it is not possible for an impenitent unbelieving soul to taste that peace which passeth all understanding; so neither can one who is morose, or irritable, or vindictive: "His sins will hide good things from him, and will separate between him and his God^e."

The promise in the text is supposed by many to refer to the *land* of Canaan; and to that as typical of heaven^f. And certainly in this sense also it is fulfilled to those who are truly meek. Often do they, (and never more than when suffering for righteousness' sake,) obtain Pisgah views of that promised land; and often are refreshed with the grapes of Eschol, even when most destitute of earthly comforts. In a word, they have a joy with which the stranger intermeddled not, and which is an earnest and foretaste of their heavenly inheritance^g.]

ADDRESS—

[Let St. Peter be heard in confirmation of all that has been said^h: "Good days" are "a blessing" which God designs us "to inherit:" and a meek demeanour is the means by which we are to obtain it. Let us not, however, put any Christian grace in the place of Christ: it is HE, and he alone, that can give us either peace with God, or peace in our own consciences — — — Nevertheless, meekness, *as a means*, is conducive to happiness: and it is in vain to expect happiness, either in this world or in the next, if we do not attain it. "Who then is a wise man and endued with knowledge amongst you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdomⁱ."]]

^e Isai. lix. 2.

^f τὴν γῆν.

^g Isai. xxix. 19.

^h 1 Pet. iii. 9—11.

ⁱ Jam. iii. 13.

MCCXC.

HUNGERING AND THIRSTING AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Matt. v. 6. *Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled.*

MEN naturally desire happiness: but they know not in what it is to be found. The philosophers of old wearied themselves in vain to find out what was man's chief good. But our blessed Lord has informed us wherein it consists: it is found in holiness alone; which, when embodied, as it were, and exercised in all its branches, renders us completely blessed. In

this sense we understand the words of our text ; wherein are set forth,

I. The distinctive character of a Christian—

It is a gross perversion of Scripture to interpret this passage as relating to the righteousness of Christ : for though it is true that every Christian desires to be clothed in that righteousness, and shall, in consequence of that desire, obtain his wishes, yet it is not the truth contained in the words before us : they certainly relate to that inward righteousness which every Christian must possess, and to that “holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”

Now the character of every Christian is, that he desires holiness,

1. Supremely—

[Other desires are not eradicated from the human breast : the natural appetites remain after our conversion the same as before, except as they are restrained and governed by a higher principle. In proportion, indeed, as religion gains an ascendant in the soul, those words will be verified, “He that eateth and drinketh of the water that Christ will give him, shall never thirst^a.” But from the very commencement of the divine life, all earthly things sink in the Christian’s estimation, and are accounted as dung and dross in comparison of the Divine image. In this sense “Christ is all” to him^b : and he can say, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee.”]

2. Constantly—

[While other desires remain in the heart, they will of course occasionally rise in opposition to the better principle : but the prevailing desire of the soul is after holiness. “The flesh may lust against the Spirit,” and seem for a moment to triumph over it : but “the Spirit will lust and strive against the flesh^c,” till it has vanquished its rebellious motions. The needle may be driven by violence from its accustomed position : but its attractions are ever towards the pole ; and it will never rest till it has resumed its wonted place. Its momentary diversion serves but to prove its fixed habitual inclination. In like manner, temptation itself, in rousing up the soul to action, calls forth its heavenly tendencies, and displays the holy energies with which it is endued.]

^a John iv. 14.

^b Col. iii. 11. Christ here means the image of Christ. See Disc. on that passage.

^c Gal. v. 17.

3. Insatiably—

[Every other desire may be satiated; but the more of spiritual nourishment we receive, the more will our hunger and thirst after it be increased. St. Paul himself could not sit down contented; but forgetting what he had attained, he reached forth for higher degrees of holiness^d. It is only “when we awake up after the perfect likeness of our God, that we shall be satisfied with it^e.”]

Truly enviable will this state appear, if we consider,
II. The blessedness annexed to it—

To be filled with good and nutritious food is the utmost that the bodily appetite can desire. It is in this sense that we are to understand the promise in the text. The person who hungers and thirsts after righteousness, shall be made,

1. Truly righteous—

[There is a negative kind of holiness, which is neither pleasing to God nor profitable to man: it consists merely in an abstinence from open sin, and a discharge of external duties. But real holiness pervades the whole man: it comprehends the whole circle of divine graces: it reaches to the thoughts and desires of the heart; and assimilates us to God in all his communicable perfections. Now this is that with which the true Christian shall be filled: in all his dispositions towards God and man, he shall be changed: he shall not only be delivered from all that would injure his character among men, but shall be “transformed into the very image of his God in righteousness and true holiness.”]

2. Progressively righteous—

[That degree of perfection to which Christians may attain, is not gained at once. All the members of the new man, as well as of the material body, do indeed exist at the moment of our birth: but they are then in a state of infantine weakness: and their arrival at a state of maturity is a gradual work. Now this work shall be advanced in the souls of those who earnestly desire it: “they shall hold on their way, growing stronger and stronger^f,” and, like the risen sun, “shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day^g.” “The Lord will perfect that which concerneth them^h,” and “carry on his work until the day of Christⁱ.”]

3. Perfectly righteous—

[Though absolute perfection is not to be attained in this

^d Phil. iii. 13.

^e Ps. xvii. 15.

^f Job xvii. 9.

^g Prov. iv. 18.

^h Ps. cxxxviii. 8.

ⁱ Phil. i. 6.

life, yet every righteous person may expect it, as the completion of his wishes, and the consummation of his bliss. The moment that his soul is released from this frail tabernacle, it shall bid an everlasting farewell to sin and sorrow. The hunger and thirst which characterize him in this world, will then cease for ever: there will remain to him no heights unattained, no wishes unaccomplished: his soul will be "*filled*" with the desired good, yea, filled to the utmost extent of its capacity.]

APPLICATION—

[Are there *those who, instead of hungering and thirsting after righteousness, despise it?* Tell me, will ye despise it in the day of judgment? will ye despise it, when ye shall see the difference that is put between the godly and the ungodly? And what is that which ye prefer to it? Can ye say of your pleasures, your riches, or your honours, what our Lord says of righteousness? shall ye certainly be filled with those things? or if ye were, would they ever render you truly blessed? Go, ask of Solomon, or ask of any who have made the experiment; and see whether, in their sober moments, they will not confess those things to be "vanity and vexation of spirit?" O "spend not your money any more for that which is not bread, nor labour for that which satisfieth not; but eat ye that which is good, and let your soul be satisfied with fatness^k."

Are there *those who rest in a form of religion?* Know that it is not the form, but the power, of godliness that God requires. The Pharisees of old abounded in outward duties; but "except your righteousness exceed theirs, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." That which you must desire, that which you must attain, is an universal change both of heart and life: you must become new creatures: old things must pass away, and all things become new."

Are there *any discouraged because of the small proficiency they have made in holiness?* Doubtless this is a matter of lamentation to the best of men. If indeed we are excusing ourselves, and pacifying our consciences from the idea that in this frail state we cannot but commit sin, we are deceiving our own souls; for "he that is born of God, sinneth not^l;" that is, he *allows not* himself in any sin, whether of excess or defect; whether of commission or of omission. But if "our souls are really athirst for God, and we are panting after him, as the hart after the water-brooks," we need not fear. God will ere long "fill the hungry with good things;" "he will satisfy the longing soul, and replenish every sorrowful soul." The very idea of hunger is a painful sensation of want; and if holiness be the object of that appetite, all *shall be* well, yea, and all *is* well: "that soul *is* blessed, and *shall be* filled."]

^k Isai. lv. 2, 3.

^l 1 John iii. 9.

MCCXCI.

THE REWARD OF MERCIFULNESS.

Matt. v. 7. *Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.*

THERE can be no doubt but that every Minister should set forth the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel with frequency and firmness. If he lay not the foundation well, he can never hope to have his labours crowned with success. On the other hand, it becomes him very earnestly to inculcate the necessity of a Christian temper: and, if he be not attentive to this, he must expect, that, whilst his people are filled with head-knowledge, they will dishonour their profession both by their spirit and conduct. Our blessed Lord, throughout this whole discourse, shews us the importance of cultivating holy and heavenly dispositions: and, at the same time that he corrects the false notions which were entertained respecting the nature of his kingdom, declares unequivocally, that it is the practical Christian, and he only, that is truly blessed.

In considering the declaration before us, let us inquire,

I. Who are they that answer to the character in the text—

Love has respect to men universally, whatever their condition be; but mercifulness has respect to them as objects of pity and compassion. Now “the merciful” man sympathizes with persons in affliction, and desires to relieve them. He looks with an eye of pity,

1. Upon those who are bowed down under their troubles —

[If their trials be of a *temporal* nature, he longs to render them such service as their necessities require. Are they labouring under *bodily diseases*? he will rejoice to procure for them all necessary aid^a. Are they oppressed with *poverty*, or in *embarrassed circumstances*? he will deny himself in order to impart

^a Job xxx. 25.

to them^b. Are they distressed on account of *painful bereavements*? he will labour to assuage the anguish of their minds by tender assiduities and suitable consolations^c.

If their trials be of a *spiritual* nature, he will labour to bring them to that heavenly Physician, who will apply "the balm of Gilead" to their souls. If *a sense of guilt* appal them, he will lead them to "the fountain opened for sin," and encourage them with assurances that "the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse them from all sin^d." If they be sorely *tempted* by Satan, he will endeavour to counteract the wiles and devices of their great adversary, and to direct them to that adorable Saviour, whose "grace shall be sufficient for them^e." If they be dejected on account of *the hidings of God's face*, he will "strengthen their weak hands, and confirm their feeble knees, and say unto their fearful hearts, Your God *will* come and save you^f."]

2. Upon those who, though unconscious of their state, are really in a pitiable condition—

[Does he behold a poor drunken man staggering in the streets? he cannot laugh at his frantic gestures, but is ready to weep over him, as he would over a maniac or an idiot that was lacerating his own flesh, or beating his head against a wall. The scoffing infidel, the proud Pharisee, the profane sensualist, the self-deceiving professor, and the bitter persecutor, all in their turn call forth his compassionate regards. He mourns over them, well knowing the misery which they are bringing on themselves^g: and, instead of despising them on account of the superiority of his own character, he longs, if possible, to "turn them from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God." If he see any hopeful signs in them, "he travails in birth with them, till Christ be formed in them^h." Even if they be incorrigibly obstinate, he will not presently give up all hope, but will still watch for opportunities of doing them good. Filled with compassion towards them, he will, if possible, "save them with fear, pulling them out of the fireⁱ." If he himself be evil entreated by them, he is affected with pity rather than with anger; and laments, not so much the injury which he suffers from them, as the injury they do unto their own souls^k.]

Such is the merciful man: O that there were in all of us such a heart!

^b Job xxix. 11, 16. ^c 1 Thess. iv. 13, 14, 18.

^d Zech. xiii. 1. 1 John i. 7.

^e Eph. vi. 10—18. 2 Cor. xii. 7—9. ^f Isai. xxxv. 3, 4.

^g So did David, Ps. cxix. 136. Jeremiah, Jer. ix. 1. Paul, Phil. iii. 18, 19. Christ himself, Luke xix. 41.

^h Gal. iv. 19. ⁱ Jude, ver. 22, 23.

^k 2 Cor. xii. 15. Luke xxiii. 34.

To prove that all such characters are “blessed,” we shall proceed to inquire,

II. What is the reward promised to them—

“They shall obtain mercy,” says our blessed Lord. But from whom? from *man*? yes, from man. Good men universally will account it the joy of their hearts to administer to them, whenever occasion shall require it — — — And even bad men have within themselves such a conviction of the excellence of such characters, that they must do violence to themselves, before they can withhold that assistance which their necessities may require. Thus Job found it¹, and so shall we^m.

But supposing that men are ungrateful and unmerciful, still such characters shall be blessed; for God will be merciful unto them:

1. Here—

[He will rather feed them by the ministry of ravens, than suffer them to want. “The lions may lack and suffer hunger; but *they* shall not want any good thing.” “God will supply all their want according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus,” and “will bless them in all that they put their hand untoⁿ.” But it is in their *souls* that they shall experience the richest blessings. Who can express the joy and delight which merciful men often experience in the exercise of their benevolence. It is no little joy that they diffuse; but infinitely more that they receive: they find the truth of that favourite saying of our Lord, “It is more blessed to give than to receive^o.” This, indeed, is promised to them^p — — — and that God who cannot lie, will not fail to fulfil his word. In the time of their own greatest need, they shall find God’s mercy to them most abundant^q.]

We make our appeal to all who have exerted themselves much in doing good, whether they have not found it incomparably “better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting.”

2. Hereafter—

[Though no dispositions or actions of ours can *merit* any thing at the hands of God, he will give unto them “a reward

¹ Job xlii. 11, 12.

^m Luke vi. 38. Eccl. xi. 1.

ⁿ Phil. iv. 17—19. Deut. xv. 10.

^o Acts xx. 35.

^p Isai. lviii. 10, 11.

^q Ps. xli. 1—3.

of grace^r." He would even account himself "unjust," if he did not do so^s. He considers himself as our debtor for every thing that we do, provided we do it from a sense of gratitude to him, and of zeal for his glory; and "he will repay us^t." Not even "a cup of cold water, given for his sake," shall pass without a recompence^u. Our exertions in acts of mercy will be the peculiar subjects of his inquiry in the day of judgment, and will be considered as evidences either of our being meet for glory, or ripe for vengeance^x. And if we be found to have fulfilled his will in relation to them, our harvest shall be proportioned to the seed that we have sown^y. Certainly it becomes us to be jealous of ourselves, that we do not found our hopes of salvation upon our deeds of mercy: for Jesus Christ is the only foundation of a sinner's hope^z: but if we look for happiness to arise from the employment of "the unrighteous mammon," we must look for it, not in the hoarding of riches, nor in making them subservient to carnal gratifications, but in doing good with them^a: and *in that view*, we do lay up a good foundation against the time to come, a foundation that shall stand for ever^b.]

We will subjoin for your use some salutary CAUTIONS:

1. Be careful to distinguish between mercy and piety—

[It is possible for persons to be of a merciful disposition, whilst they are utter strangers to real piety. Natural constitution has made some more tender than others; and education has formed some to better habits. But it often happens, that persons of benevolent minds imagine all religion to consist in acts of kindness to their fellow-creatures. They found this notion even on the word of God itself^c: but they sadly misinterpret that passage, and entirely overlook the duty of "walking humbly with God." But this is no less necessary than acts of justice and of mercy: yea, without it all our virtues will be no better than splendid sins^d — — —]

2. Be careful at the same time to combine mercy with piety—

[Piety cannot exist without mercy. "The wisdom that is from above is full of mercy and good fruits^e." "The tree that bringeth forth not good fruit is fit only to be hewn down and cast into the fire." It is by "bearing one another's burdens that we fulfil the law of Christ^f." We may *talk* of love

^r Rom. iv. 4.

^s Heb. vi. 10.

^t Prov. xix. 17.

^u Matt. x. 42.

^x Matt. xxv. 34—46.

^y 2 Cor. ix. 6.

^z 1 Cor. iii. 11.

^a Luke xvi. 9.

^b 1 Tim. vi. 17—19.

^c Mic. vi. 8.

^d Hab. i. 16.

^e Jam. iii. 17.

^f Gal. v. 2.

to God, but we cannot possess it, if we delight not in every act and exercise of love^g. We may give good words to our indigent neighbour; but, if we do not administer relief at the same time, he will be no better for us: and as our pretences to love will be of no benefit to him, so neither will our pretences to faith be of any benefit to ourselves^h. If we have not learned to "weep with them that weepⁱ," it is to no purpose to call ourselves Christians: we only deceive our own souls^k."

But it may be said, We have not a capacity to instruct our fellow-creatures; nor have we ability to relieve them: must we therefore be excluded from the number of true Christians? No: "If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not^l." But let us be sure that there is in us that willing mind, and that God sees "the yearning of our bowels" in secret prayer for the relief of those, whom, in other respects, we are unable to assist.]

3. Be on your guard against any declension in the exercise of this duty—

[We are changeable creatures; and they who "have run well" for a season, are sometimes "hindered" in a more advanced stage of their course^m. But let us be on our guard, that we "be not weary in well-doingⁿ." If we have learned how "to walk and to please God, we should then endeavour to abound more and more^o." There is no limit at which we should stop. God himself is the pattern we should keep in view; and we should seek to "be merciful as our Father which is in heaven is merciful^p." If we want motives to exertion, let us reflect on the mercy shewn to us by our adorable Lord and Saviour, "who gave his own life a ransom for us:" or let us consider what compassion he yet daily exercises towards us, "being touched with the feeling of our infirmities^q:" and, as he has so loved us as to die for us, let us remember, that life itself is not too great a sacrifice for us to make, to promote the welfare of our fellow-creatures^r.]

^g 1 John iii. 17.

^h Jam. ii. 15, 16.

ⁱ Rom. xii. 13.

^k Jam. ii. 13.

^l 2 Cor. viii. 12.

^m Gal. v. 7.

ⁿ Gal. vi. 9.

^o 1 Thess. iv. 1.

^p Luke vi. 36.

^q Heb. iv. 15.

^r 1 John iii. 16.

MCCXCII.

PURITY OF HEART.

Matt. v. 8. *Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.*

THERE is nothing in which mankind more generally imagine happiness to consist than in the uncontrolled indulgence of their passions. It is probable that among those who looked for the establishment of the Messiah's kingdom, many pleased themselves with the idea, that his victories would open to them a way for multiplying captives to any extent, and consequently for the unlimited gratification of their corrupt appetites. To counteract such absurd notions, and to evince the spiritual nature of his kingdom, our blessed Lord declared, that happiness was to be found, not "in assimilating" ourselves to the brute creation, but in purity of heart and life: "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God."

I. The character here mentioned, is that which *first* claims our attention—

Purity of heart may be considered as opposed to hypocrisy: in that sense it denotes a freedom from base and selfish ends in the whole of our transactions, both with God and man. Strange as it may seem, the duties of religion itself may be performed from very unworthy motives. Pride, ostentation, self-righteousness, self-complacency, may lie at the foundation of those very services whereby we pretend to honour God; and may render them, not only worthless, but hateful in his sight^a. Our conduct also towards man may be very specious, and yet be full of dissimulation and craft. It is no uncommon thing, as all who are conversant with the world know, to see men, under the guise of friendship, aiming only at the advancement of their own interests. Such duplicity is hateful to a true Christian. He that is "an Israelite indeed, is without guile." Purity of heart, in this sense, is beautifully exemplified in the Apostle Paul, whose ministrations had no other object than to advance the glory of God in the salvation of men^b. O that all of us possessed the same integrity; and could, like him, appeal both to God and man for the purity of our intentions, and the simplicity of our minds!

^a Zech. vii. 5, 6.

^b 1 Thess. ii. 3—6. and 2 Cor. ii. 17.

But purity may also be understood in opposition to uncleanness: and, if we suppose that our Lord designed to condemn the sensuality of those who expected the Messiah as a temporal Prince, we must of course annex that meaning to his words. Perhaps the more enlarged sense of the text, as comprehending both ideas, is the more just: but as the latter idea is of singular importance, we shall consider the character chiefly in reference to *that*.

We observe, then, that the person who is pure in heart,

1. Abstains from all *acts* of uncleanness—

[Others may make light of fornication and adultery: but he knows them to be ruinous and damning sins: and he abstains from them, not merely from the fear of detection and disgrace, but from a dread of displeasing Almighty God, and of plunging his soul into everlasting misery. He is well convinced, that “the body was not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body^c.” He considers “his body as a member of Christ himself;” and, if tempted to “take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot,” he exclaims with horror, “God forbid^d!”]

2. Harbours no evil desires in his heart—

[Being of like passions with others, he cannot but feel as others on some occasions: but he has learned through grace to counteract the propensities of nature, and to “crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts^e.” He knows that “fleshly lusts war against the soul^f,” and that, if not vigorously opposed in the first instance, they will soon gain the ascendant, and lead him captive. He sees how others are enslaved, “having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin^g.” He has heard of that confession in the book of Proverbs, “I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and the assembly^h,” and he dreads lest he in like manner should become a prey to his evil passions. If evil thoughts or desires arise, he regards them as fire, which, if not extinguished speedily, will inflame and consume his soul. Hence he prays day and night, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within meⁱ.” He is not contented with being “like a whited sepulchre, beautiful without, but full of all uncleanness within:” he is as attentive to “the inside of the cup and platter,” as he is to its exterior appearance^k.]

^c 1 Cor. vi. 13.

^d 1 Cor. vi. 15.

^e Gal. v. 24.

^f 1 Pet. ii. 11.

^g 2 Pet. ii. 14.

^h Prov. v. 14.

ⁱ Ps. li. 10.

^k Matt. xxiii. 25—28.

3. Avoids the occasions of evil—

[Many who have a regard for their character, will yet make no scruple of reading books, or hearing songs, or attending scenes, which tend to vitiate the mind. They will even court occasions of evil, delighting in that company and conversation which they know by experience to produce bad impressions on their hearts.

Not so the person that is pure in heart: he stands at a distance from every polluting object¹: like Joseph, he flies from those who would corrupt him^m: like Job, he “makes a covenant with his eyes,” and with his heart, that he will neither look, nor think, upon an object that will ensnare himⁿ. He knows that “the very thought of foolishness is sin^o,” and he is determined through grace, that “vain thoughts shall not lodge with him.” He hates them: he lothes himself for his propensity to indulge them; and he longs to be “holy as God himself is holy^p.”]

II. The blessedness of those who have attained this character, is the next point to be considered:

1. They shall enjoy a sight of God in this world—

[It is true, that “God dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto,” and that, in strictness of speech, “no man hath seen him, or can see him.” But there were manifestations of him vouchsafed to his people of old, sometimes through the medium of the human or angelic form, and sometimes by a bright effulgence of his glory. There are also other manifestations which God still makes of himself to the souls of men^a; and which he will vouchsafe to the pure in heart. It must not, however, be expected that, in speaking of these things, we can bring them down to the apprehension of the ungodly: *they* have no eyes to see them, no ears to hear them, no understandings to understand them: and it is as vain to speak of these things to them, as it would be to speak of colours to the blind, or sounds to the deaf, or tastes to those who had no palate. Nevertheless we must affirm, on the authority of God himself, that “the pure in heart shall see God.” They shall see him *in his ordinances*, whilst others are altogether unconscious of his presence. They shall see him *in their secret chamber*, where he will draw nigh unto them, and “say, Here I am^r.” They shall see him *in all the works of creation*, and *in all the dispensations of his providence*. They shall see him *in every comfort* and *in every cross*. His wisdom, his goodness,

¹ Ps. lxxiii. 1.^m Gen. xxxix. 9, 10.ⁿ Job xxxi. 1.^o Prov. xxiv. 9.^p 1 Pet. i. 14—16.^a John xiv. 21—23.^r Job xxxiii. 26. Isai. lviii. 9.

his love, his mercy, his faithfulness, are ever before their eyes. They have such views of him and his perfections as words cannot describe; and such fellowship with him as a carnal man has no idea of^s. The impure may mourn, and even "howl upon their beds;" but the pure, like Moses of old, have near access to God, and see "him who is invisible;" and by this sight are strengthened, supported, comforted, and sanctified.]

2. They shall behold the beatific vision in heaven—

[Thither the unclean can never be admitted^u. As well might "light have communion with darkness, or Christ with Belial," as they participate the blessedness of heaven. If it be asked, "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, and stand in his holy place?" the answer is, "He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart^x." To him a glorious inheritance is promised: for him a place in the heavenly mansions is prepared: a seat upon the very throne of God himself is reserved for him. There shall his organs of vision be strengthened to behold all the glory of the Godhead. At present he "sees God only as through a glass, darkly; but then will he behold him face to face. Now he knows God only in part; but then he will know him, even as he himself is known^y."]]

ADDRESS—

1. The gay and dissipated—

[Perhaps you refrain from gross iniquity; and therefore "imagine yourselves pure, though you are not washed from your inward filthiness^z." In this notion you are countenanced by the world at large: — — — but "let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of inward, as well as outward impurity, the wrath of God cometh upon all the children of disobedience^a." "Your bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost; and if any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy^b." Nevertheless, if you deeply repent of your past sins, you shall be forgiven^c; and if you believe in Christ, you shall be both sanctified and saved^d.]

2. The professors of religion—

[How many who have run well for a season have been hindered and turned aside through the prevalence of their own evil passions! We need not go back to David and Solomon: there is not a place where religion has made any progress, but

^s 1 John i. 3.

^t Heb. xi. 27.

^u Eph. v. 5. Heb. xii. 14.

^x Ps. xxiv. 4.

^y 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

^z Prov. xxx. 12.

^a Eph. v. 6. 2 Pet. ii. 9, 10.

^b 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17.

^c Jam. iv. 8, 9.

^d 1 Cor. vi. 9—11.

affords some lamentable proof of the influence of unsubdued lusts. A religious person first conceives a thought; and that thought is suffered to dwell upon his mind. The mind inflamed, yields to the impulse of desire so far as to court familiarity with the alluring object: conscience reproves; but the deceitful heart suggests, that, as no positive act of sin is intended, no evil will arise. Corruption now begins to work more strongly; and every renewed familiarity with temptation increases its power over us; so that we scarcely know how to keep from the place or person whom we ought to shun. Conscience remonstrates, but in vain; till at last the devil takes us in his snare, and we bring disgrace on our holy profession, and cause the name of God to be blasphemed^e. This is the history of many a religious character. Would we avoid this melancholy *end*? let us avoid the *means*. Let us “keep our hearts with all diligence^f,” let us live nigh to God, and beg of him to keep us. Let us beware how we “grieve his Spirit,” by tampering with sin, or parleying with temptation. Let us “walk in the Spirit; and then we shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh^g.” Let us often ask ourselves, What we shall think of such things in a dying hour? Little dost thou think, whoever thou art that art yielding to the tempter, how thou art filling thy dying pillow with thorns; and wilt most probably bring on thyself a condemnation far heavier than that of Sodom and Gomorrha. O may God take you out of the horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set your feet upon a rock, and establish your goings^h!” But concerning this evil we may say, as our Lord said concerning a deaf and dumb spirit whom his disciples could not cast out, “This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fastingⁱ.”]

3. The conscientious Christian—

[Blessed art thou, who art enabled to maintain “a conscience void of offence towards God and man.” Thou art blessed, and shalt be blessed. If *thou* dost not see so much of God as thou wouldst, thou hast far different views of him from what *they* have who give way to sin. And the time is fast approaching, when thou shalt no more complain of darkness and distance from God, but shalt “behold his face in righteousness, and be satisfied with it^k.”

Yet even to thee must I say, Watch against the assaults of sin and Satan. It is not past experience that will keep thee: for Solomon fell “after God had appeared to him twice^l.” Nor is it high attainments that will preserve thee: for the man after

^e See Jam. i. 14, 15.

^f Prov. iv. 23.

^g Gal. v. 16.

^h Ps. xl. 2.

ⁱ Matt. xvii. 21.

^k Ps. xvii. 15.

^l 1 Kings xi. 9.

God's own heart became a monument of human frailty and depravity. Nor is even marriage itself sufficient to extinguish the unhallowed flame. You may have, if I may so say, whole flocks at your command, and yet it will not keep you from coveting your neighbour's ewe-lamb^m. It is grace, and grace alone, that will enable you to hold on unto the end. In Christ you may trust with joyful confidence: "He is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joyⁿ." Moreover, he has promised that "you shall have no temptation without a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it^o." Apply this promise to your souls, and you shall be enabled to "cleanse yourselves from all filthiness, both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God^p." Depend not for one moment on yourselves, but "be strong in the grace that is in Christ:" and may the very God of Peace sanctify you wholly! and I pray God that your whole body, soul, and spirit, may be sanctified wholly unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ^q!]

^m 2 Sam. xii. 2, 4, 8, 9.ⁿ Jude, ver. 24.^o 1 Cor. x. 13.^p 2 Cor. vii. 1.^q 1 Thess. v. 23.

MCCXCIII.

THE PEACE-MAKERS.

Matt. v. 9. *Blessed are the peace-makers: for they shall be called the children of God.*

RELIGION is altogether a practical thing: it has its foundation indeed in principles; but it has a superstructure of dispositions and actions, which are necessary both to its completion and utility. Nothing can be a stronger proof of this than the discourse before us: for, however we may suppose it designed to rectify men's notions respecting the nature of the Messiah's kingdom, and to explain the law in opposition to the false glosses of the Scribes and Pharisees, its direct tendency is to raise the standard of morality both in the hearts and lives of men. The beatitudes which we have already considered, refer principally to the exercises of the heart: that which we propose to notice at this time, relates to the conduct: and, as our blessed Lord has counted it worthy of such a conspicuous place in his discourse,

we may be well assured that it deserves from us the most attentive consideration.

Let us then, as on former occasions, consider,

I. The character here spoken of—

The term which we translate “peace-makers,” may be understood, like those which have preceded it, as marking only a pacific temper and conduct^a. But in that view it will correspond very nearly with “the meek,” whose character has been already considered. We therefore take the word agreeably to the sense in which it is translated; and observe, that the peace-makers are they who are studious,

1. To preserve peace where it is—

[View them in the whole of their conduct, and they will be found “following after the things which make for peace.”

View them *in the State*. They are not like many who take upon them to condemn every thing which their governors do: no: they see the evil of a murmuring, discontented, turbulent, and seditious spirit: they are “afraid to speak evil of dignities^b,” they bear in mind the command of God, “Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people^c,” and, instead of “exercising themselves in matters that are too high for them^d,” and presuming to judge of measures without having one half the grounds of judgment before them, and “meddling with those who are given to change^e,” they are characterized as people “quiet in the land^f.”

View them *in the Church*. It is their constant endeavour so to walk as to “give no offence in any thing,” to “cast no stumbling-block before any,” but to edify all in faith and love. Many there are, so bigoted to their own sect or party, or so fond of some particular doctrines, that they can scarcely meet a brother or a sister without bringing forward their favourite opinions; and not at all concerned what perplexities they cause in the minds of individuals, or what divisions in the Church, provided they can but make proselytes, and increase their own party^g. Such generally obtrude themselves wherever the Gospel is faithfully preached; and are but too successful in “beguiling unstable souls,” and in “corrupting them from the simplicity that is in Christ^h.” This they do in direct opposition to the command, “Him that is weak in the faith

^a Compare 1 John ii. 29. and iii. 4. with the text, in the Greek.

^b 2 Pet. ii. 10.

^c Acts xxiii. 5.

^d Ps. cxxxi. 1.

^e Prov. xxiv. 21.

^f Ps. xxxv. 20.

^g Tit. i. 10, 11.

^h 2 Cor. xi. 3.

receive ye, but *not to doubtful disputations*¹." The peacemakers, on the contrary, will "bear the infirmities of the weak^k;" will deny themselves many lawful things, rather than wound a tender conscience¹; and will "become all things to all men^m:" in short, they will do any thing, or forbear any thing, that they may "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peaceⁿ."

View them *in the family*. Here they are conspicuous for their unremitting exercise of forbearance and love. They do not take offence at every trifle: and, instead of thwarting the little humours and peculiarities of those around them, they are happy to gratify them, and to win their affections by courtesy and condescension. They remember that wise proverb, "Where no wood is, the fire goeth out; so where there is no tale-bearer, the strife ceaseth^o;" and, from a regard to this, they will not listen to tales and stories; much less will they contribute to the circulation of them. If constrained to hear one side of a question, they will suspend their judgment till they have heard the other: and will be studious to weaken, rather than confirm, the unfavourable impressions of the accuser's mind. If a person seem determined to strive with them, they will rather yield their right, than maintain a controversy with him^p. Their conduct in their families may be briefly summed up in those words of David, "They keep their tongue from evil, and their lips from speaking guile: they depart from evil, and do good; they seek peace, and pursue it^q."

2. To restore it where it is not—

[They do not impertinently obtrude themselves on others, or interfere in concerns which belong not to them: they are aware that "he who meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one who taketh a dog by the ears^r." Yet, if they see an opportunity where they may properly interpose, they are willing, even at a considerable risk, to exert themselves to the utmost for the restoration of peace. If chosen, or permitted to arbitrate between parties, they will not undertake the office but in *a spirit of love*, and with an ardent longing to accomplish the desired end. In executing the office of an umpire, they guard against any undue bias; well knowing, that without the strictest *impartiality* they can never hope to bring over the contending parties to an acquiescence in their decisions. Having begun the good work, they will *persevere* in it, notwithstanding all the discouragements which they may

ⁱ Rom. xiv. 1. ^k Rom. xv. 1. ¹ Rom. xiv. 21. 1 Cor. viii. 13.

^m 1 Cor. ix. 19—22.

ⁿ Eph. iv. 3.

^o Prov. xxvi. 20.

^p 1 Cor. vi. 7. See Gen. xiii. 8, 9.

^q Ps. xxxiv. 13, 14. with 1 Pet. iii. 8—11. ^r Prov. xxvi. 17.

meet with from the obstinacy of those whom they attempt to reconcile. The more blameworthy of the two will usually be found the more unreasonable and perverse^s: but they will patiently bear with much opposition, if by any means they may attain the great object of their wishes.]

In the exercise of this benevolent disposition, they are sure to find,

II. The blessedness annexed to it—

When it is said that “they shall be *called* the children of God, we must understand, that,

1. They shall be so in reality—

[That this is the import of the expression, appears from the parallel passage in St. John’s Epistles; where, having represented believers as *called* the children of God, he immediately adds, “Now *are* we the sons of God^t,” and to the same effect he speaks in his Gospel; “To as many as believed, to them gave he power to *become* the sons of God^u.” Of course we must throughout all these beatitudes, guard against supposing that the reward annexed to the different dispositions is founded on any *merit* in man. The reward must always be considered as “a reward of grace, and not as a debt^x.” It is not to be conceived that there should be such *merit* in making peace between our fellow-creatures, as that it should *deserve* such a reward at the hands of God. If we only bear this in mind, we need not be afraid of expecting all the honour which God here promises to the peaceful man. It is taken for granted, that, in our offices of love to man, we are actuated by a sense of love to God: and that, whilst we labour to promote peace amongst our brethren, we are careful to have peace maintained between God and our own souls by the blood of Christ. *Then* shall we be “sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty^y :” yea, we shall “have a name given to us better than of sons and of daughters^z.” Together with this relation to God, the peace-makers shall possess all the exalted privileges connected with it: “being sons, they shall be heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ^a.” It does “not indeed fully appear what they shall hereafter be: but this we know, that when they shall see their heavenly Father, they shall be like him; for they shall see him as he is^b.”]

2. They shall be reputed such by their fellow-creatures—

^s Acts vii. 27.

^t 1 John iii. 1, 2.

^u John i. 12.

^x Rom. iv. 4.

^y 2 Cor. vi. 18.

^z Isai. lvi. 5.

^a Rom. viii. 17.

^b 1 John iii. 2.

[It is true, that the world at large are not very ready to acknowledge the excellencies of believers, or to allow their claims of relationship to God. But there is something in a peaceful spirit, which carries its own evidence along with it, and constrains the beholder to do it homage. St. Paul particularly notices this; and declares, that he who acts under its influence for the honour of Christ, is both “accepted of God, and *approved of men*.” We know indeed that the enmity of the human heart against God is such, as to instigate men to persecute even unto death the very persons whom in their consciences they cannot but admire. We therefore do not mean to say that the peace-makers shall meet with no hostility from men; (for our blessed Lord and his Apostles were all crucified or slain :) but that the proper tendency of their conduct is, to conciliate the regard of men, and to impress them with the idea, that they are actuated by the grace of God, and honoured with his peculiar favour.]

Surely this blessedness is worthy of our pursuit. To BE Children of the Most High God is the great object to which we should continually aspire: and to *approve ourselves* such to others is also most desirable; because we shall thereby “silence the ignorance of foolish men,” and constrain them to “glorify our Father which is in heaven.”]

Let me, in CONCLUSION, urge you to seek this blessed character—

[Think *how happy* you will be in the possession of it. “The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace^d.” It is not possible to engage much in such labours of love, without having our own souls refreshed and comforted with the heavenly employment. The sacred oil which you pour on the heads of others, will regale you with its odours; and the dews of divine grace, which, through your instrumentality, descend on others, shall enrich and fertilize your own souls^e.

Consider further, *how serviceable* you will be in your day and generation. As one litigious or contentious person may be the means of producing incalculable evils to the Church and to society; (for a little fire is sufficient to destroy a whole town^f;) so one pious, discreet, and active peace-maker may extinguish flames, which might have spread desolation and misery all around. See an instance of this in Abigail, who, by her seasonable interposition, restrained the wrath of David, and saved the lives of Nabal and all his family^g. Thus may you confer blessings on all around you, and heap blessings also on your own heads^h.

^c Rom. xiv. 18, 19.

^d Jam. iij. 18.

^e Ps. cxxxiii. 1—3.

^f Jam. iii. 5.

^g 1 Sam. xxv. 18—31.

^h 1 Sam. xxv. 32, 33.

Lastly, consider *what a recompence* awaits you in the eternal world. There shall this promise be fulfilled to you in its utmost extent.

Cultivate then this amiable disposition, that you may be "sons of God, without rebuke, and shine as lights in a benighted worldⁱ."]]

ⁱ Phil. ii. 14, 15.

MCCXCIV.

PERSECUTION FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE.

Matt. v. 10—12. *Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*

CHRISTIANITY, to one who is not acquainted with its real nature, must appear full of paradoxes. In the preceding verses, we are informed what *practical* religion is; and, in the parallel passage in St. Luke's Gospel, we have the same truths yet more plainly and explicitly declared^a. Had any uninspired person avowed such sentiments, we should have been ready to pronounce him mad: for there is scarcely any thing which we regard with dread, but a blessing is annexed to it; or any thing which we consider as desirable, but a woe is denounced against it: the poor, the hungry, the weeping, the despised, are congratulated; and the rich, the full, the laughing, and the honoured, are represented as in a truly pitiable condition. But perhaps the greatest paradox of all is, that persons possessed of vital Christianity should be objects of persecution; that their piety should be the ground of that persecution; and that they should, on this very account, be esteemed happy. But so it is: and so it will appear; if we consider,

I. The case here supposed—

^a Luke vi. 20—26.

Our blessed Lord evidently supposes that his people will be persecuted for righteousness' sake. But,

This, it must be confessed, is a very improbable case—

[*The very character of his people seems to preclude the idea.* Were the disciples of Christ the very reverse of what they are, we might well expect them to be objects of hatred and contempt. But who can hate the humble, the meek, the pure, the peaceful, and those whose chief desire is to serve and honour God? — — — What connexion can there be between the verses of our text, and the whole preceding context? One would imagine that the declaration before us was altogether destitute of any foundation in fact.

That their very righteousness should be the ground of their suffering, appears still more strange. If they were obnoxious to the charge of sedition, or to any thing else that rendered them bad members of society, one would not wonder that they should be evil treated on those accounts, notwithstanding they might in other respects be eminently holy. But that their conformity to Christ should be the true reason of the world's enmity against them, seems incredible.]

But we are taught to expect that it would exist—

[Our blessed Lord warned all his disciples, that they would receive, each in his appointed measure, the very same treatment as he received^b. And his Apostles guard us against being surprised or offended at it^c.

We must not indeed imagine that our enemies will avow the real ground of their aversion: they will not say, I hate you for your piety: they will give some other name to piety: they will call it fanaticism, or hypocrisy; and under that character will raise up their voice against it. When the Jews threatened to stone our Lord, he said to them, "Many good works have I done among you; for which of them do you stone me?" They replied, "For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God^d." In like manner they sought to put him to death for violating, as they alleged, the sanctity of the Sabbath day^e. But whence came all this zeal for God's honour, and for the observance of the Sabbath? Were they all so holy and so righteous? No: in the midst of all their pretended concern for God's law, they were ready enough to violate it themselves, and even to commit murder: which was a demonstration, that the reasons they assigned were mere pretexts; and that the

^b John xv. 18—21. and xvi. 1—3.

^c 1 Pet. iv. 12. 1 John iii. 13. ^d John x. 32, 33.

^e John vii. 19, 23.

sanctity of his character was the true ground of their opposition to him. Precisely thus must we expect persecution, ostensibly as evil-doers, but really as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.]

And experience proves that it does exist—

[Look at the holy men of old: where will ye find one who was not persecuted for righteousness' sake? And are the descendants of Cain or of Ishmael extinct? Is not that which St. Paul spoke in reference to Ishmael, still found true? "*As then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now^f.*" Christians are not indeed dragged, as formerly, to prison and to death: but shall we therefore say, that they are not persecuted? Are they not "*reviled?*" Have they not "*all manner of evil spoken against them falsely?*" Do not men "*separate them from their company,*" and "*reproach them, and cast out their name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake^g?*" Yes truly: "*All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer, yea and do suffer, persecution^h.*" There is not a single exception to be found. Times and circumstances may produce considerable difference in the nature or degree of opposition which may be made to the Lord's people: but all will have to experience *some*. Christianity is the same in itself that it ever was: and it will be found the same in its effects. Christ "*came not to bring peace, but a swordⁱ:*" and whoever gives himself up to Christ, must expect to find, that "*his greatest foes will be those of his own household.*"]

Granting, then, that this case does exist, let us consider,

II. The light in which it should be viewed—

To the eye of sense it has a very terrific aspect: but to the eye of faith it is by no means formidable: on the contrary, the believer views his persecutions,

1. As a badge of honour—

[He looks back on all the prophets; he looks at Christ and his Apostles; and sees that they all trod the same thorny path before him, and "*were made perfect through sufferings.*" Hence he views persecution as "*the reproach of Christ^k;*" and, in submitting to it, considers himself as "*a partaker of Christ's sufferings^l.*" Whilst others consider him as degraded by the contempt cast upon him, he regards himself rather as exalted by it: he views it as "*turning unto him for a testimony^m,*"

^f Gal. iv. 29.

^g Luke vi. 22.

^h 2 Tim. iii. 12.

ⁱ Matt. x. 34—36.

Luke xii. 51. 53.

^k Heb. xi. 25, 26.

^l 1 Pet. iv. 13.

^m Luke xxi. 12, 13.

that he is indeed a faithful servant of his Lord. St. Paul, speaking of sufferings for Christ's sake, represents them as a special gift of God, an honour bestowed upon us for Christ's sakeⁿ: and in this light all the Apostles regarded them: for when they had been imprisoned and scourged for their fidelity to their Divine Master, they went out of the presence of the Council, "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for Christ's sake^o." Thus, Christian, shouldst thou do: thou shouldst "glory in the cross of Christ^p;" thou shouldst "take pleasure in persecutions for Christ's sake^q;" and instead of being ashamed of the indignities which thou sufferest, thou shouldst glorify God on account of them^r.]

2. As a means of good—

[Even at present the believer feels that his trials are subservient to his best interests^s; that his tribulations tend to increase his "patience, experience, and hope^t;" and bring him a hundredfold of blessings into his soul^u. And when he looks forward to the eternal world, and considers how rich "a recompence" he shall there receive for every sacrifice which he has here made for God^x, he "accounts himself happy" in being called to bear the cross^y. He knows that "the trial of his faith will be found to praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ^z;" and that "his afflictions, which are but light and momentary, will work for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory^a." He expects assuredly "the kingdom of heaven," because God has promised it to him^b: yea, he expects more: he expects that "his reward shall be great in heaven," and increased in proportion to his sufferings: he expects it also as a *just* retribution^c: but still he does not expect it as *merited* by those sufferings: he makes the atoning blood of Christ the only foundation of his hope: and it is for Christ's merits, and not his own, that he is thus exalted. This distinction is accurately marked by the Apostle John: who, seeing in a vision all the martyred saints who "had come out of much tribulation," tells us, that "they had washed their robes," not in their own tears or blood, but "in the blood of the Lamb; and that *therefore* they were before the throne of God^d." Bear this in mind, my brethren, and do not hesitate to expect all that God has promised.]

3. As a ground of joy—

ⁿ Phil. i. 29.

^q 2 Cor. xii. 10.

^t Rom. v. 3—5.

^y Jam. v. 11.

^a 2 Cor. iv. 8—11, 16, 17.

^c 2 Thess. i. 6, 7.

^o Acts v. 41.

^r 1 Pet. iv. 16.

^u Mark x. 29, 30.

^z 1 Pet. i. 7.

^d Rev. vii. 14, 15.

^p Gal. vi. 14.

^s Heb. xii. 11.

^x Heb. xii. 26.

^b 2 Tim. ii. 12.

[Our blessed Lord, in reference to those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, says, "Blessed are ye;" and he calls upon them to "rejoice, and be exceeding glad." To the same effect also his Apostles speak; congratulating every persecuted saint, and encouraging him to "glory in all his tribulations^e." Doubtless, "afflictions are not joyous in themselves, but grievous;" but, when regarded in the preceding views, they become real sources and grounds of joy. St. Paul was certainly a very competent judge: and he, after a careful computation founded on actual experience, says, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present world are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us^f." However painful therefore they may be, if only they conduce to our everlasting felicity, they must, and will, to every believing soul, be an occasion of joy. He will "take joyfully the spoiling of his goods^g;" and, if his blood be poured out as a drink-offering upon the sacrifice and service of the Church's faith, he will congratulate himself on it as a happy event, for which he has reason to bless and glorify his God^h.]

Let me however SUBJOIN *a word of caution*—

[Take care that your cross is indeed the cross of Christ. If it be brought upon you by your own fault or imprudence, it is your own cross, and not the cross of Christ. See that you do not, from a pretended zeal for God, neglect or violate your duties to man. If you suffer, take care that it is for well-doing, and not for evil doingⁱ.]

Let me ADD also *a word of encouragement*—

[God does not "send you on a warfare at your own charges." He bids you to "commit your soul to him in well-doing," with an assured hope that he will keep it^k. Your merciful Saviour, who has trod the way before you, will sympathize with you under your trials^l, and overrule them all for good^m, and in due time put you safely, and for ever, beyond the reach of allⁿ.]

^e Jam. i. 2, 12. 1 Pet. iii. 14. and iv. 12—16.

^f Rom. viii. 18.

^g Heb. x. 34.

^h Phil. ii. 17.

ⁱ 1 Pet. iii. 17.

^k 1 Pet. iv. 19.

^l Heb. iv. 15.

^m Rom. viii. 28.

ⁿ Rev. vii. 16, 17.

MCCXCV.

CHRISTIANS THE SALT OF THE EARTH.

Matt. v. 13. *Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.*

LITTLE do the world think how much they are indebted to those very saints whom they “revile and persecute for righteousness’ sake^a.” The extirpation of them (which is so much desired by many) would leave the world an entire mass of corruption, without any thing to heal its disorders, or to stop its progress towards utter destruction. Were they removed out of it, the rest would soon become as Sodom and Gomorrha^b. The representation given of them in the text fully justifies this idea. They are called “the salt of the earth.” This, of course, must be understood of those only who have the spirit of religion in them: for all others, whatever they may possess, are as vile and worthless as the real Christians are good and excellent.

The words before us will lead us to consider,

I. The worth and excellence of truly spiritual Christians—

The use of salt, as intimated in this expression of our Lord, is to keep other things from putrefaction and corruption.

This is the office that has been executed by all the saints of old—

[View them from the beginning; and they will all be found active in their generation, and zealous in benefiting the world around them. Noah preached to the antediluvians an hundred and twenty years, indefatigably exerting himself to bring them to repentance. Lot, in Sodom, “vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds,” and strove to turn the people from their horrible abominations. All the prophets in successive ages laboured in the same blessed work, using all their efforts to lead their hearers to the knowledge of the only true God, and to an obedience to his holy laws. How the Apostles acted in relation to this, it is needless to observe. They lived for no other end, but to make known the way of life, and to “turn men from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God.”

All, indeed, were not favoured with the same success. Those who preceded the Saviour, rather sowed the seed, than reaped the harvest: but his disciples, through the influence of the Spirit of God upon their labours, were instrumental to the

^a ver. 11.

^b Isai. i. 9.

conversion of thousands and of millions; all of whom in their respective spheres endeavoured to disseminate the same principles, and to spread “the *savour* of the knowledge of Christ” wherever they went. Take only one man, the Apostle Paul; and who shall say how much corruption he was the means of preventing in the world? — — —]

This is the office which every Christian, according to his ability, still executes—

[Ministers labour for this end in the word and doctrine — — — and private individuals feel themselves bound to co-operate with them, yea, I may say, to be “fellow-workers also with God.” No one who has received the grace of God in truth, will “live any longer unto himself:” he will seek to glorify his God, and to do good to those around him. Has he any relations, a father, a mother, a wife, a child, going on in ignorance and sin? he will endeavour by all possible means to rectify their dispositions, and to guide their feet into the way of peace. He will not say with himself, I am but as a grain of salt, and therefore can do *no* good: he will thankfully employ his influence, how small soever it may be, for the benefit of those to whom it will extend. Even the poorest have access to some poor neighbour like themselves: and the resolution of the weakest will be like that of the Church of old, “Draw *me*, and *we* will run after thee;” that is, ‘Draw me, and I will not come alone, but will bring all I can along with me.’

And shall this be thought a small matter? No, surely: for if a Christian be instrumental, even in the course of his whole life, to convert one single person from the error of his ways, he has effected a good, which exceeds in value the whole material world: for he has “saved a soul from death, and covered a multitude of sins^d.”]

Thus is the truly spiritual Christian, a man of great worth and excellence: but all who profess religion are not of this stamp: the text itself declares that there are some of a very different character; and that nothing can exceed,

II. The worthlessness of those who have not the savour of religion in their souls—

Salt that has lost its savour is here said to be “good for nothing; but is trodden under foot of men.” This shews the desperate state of those who are not truly alive to God. Their prospects are indeed gloomy in relation to,

^c Cant. i. 4.

^d Jam. v. 19, 20.

1. Their personal recovery—

[Salt that has lost its savour, *cannot* by any means be restored to its former pungency. And thus it is with those who, after some experience of the power of godliness, have made shipwreck of their faith and of a good conscience. Doubtless, “with God all things are possible;” and therefore **HE** *can* restore the most determined apostate: but there is very little reason to hope that he ever *will*; since he has told us, that such an one shall be given over to final impenitence^e—

The state of one who has merely declined in religion is certainly not so desperate; but still it is truly deplorable. If a man had never known any thing of religion, it might be hoped that the truths of the Gospel would influence his mind; but if he be already acquainted with those truths, and they be not able to *preserve* him, how can it be hoped that they shall have efficacy to *restore* him? Whilst “the heart is yet tender,” the Gospel is mighty in operation; because God accompanies it with his power from on high: but when “the heart is hardened through the deceitfulness of sin,” and the Spirit of God has withdrawn his agency, there is great reason to fear that the man “will draw back unto perdition.” How solemn are the admonitions given on this subject to the Church at Ephesus^f, and to that at Sardis^g! Let every one then who has declined in religious exercises and enjoyments, even though his declensions be ever so secret, tremble, lest that threatening be fulfilled in him, “The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways^h.”]

2. Their ministerial usefulness—

[“All who have received the gift, are bound to minister the same to others, as good stewards of the manifold grace of Godⁱ.” But the man that has lost the savour of religion in his own soul, is ill qualified for this: he has not *inclination* to do it, he has not *courage*, he has not *ability*. When religion flourished in his soul, he could converse upon it with pleasure: “Out of the abundance of his heart his mouth would freely speak.” But now he can converse on any other subject rather than that: he finds no satisfaction in maintaining fellowship even with the saints: it is not to be wondered at therefore that he has no disposition to instruct the ignorant, and reform the wicked. Indeed, he is afraid lest that proverb should be retorted upon him, “Physician, heal thyself:” and his own conscience will remonstrate with him in the energetic language of the Apostle, “Thou that teachest another, teachest thou

^e Heb. vi. 4—6. and x. 26, 27. . 2 Pet. ii. 20—22.

^f Rev. ii. 4, 5.

^g Rev. iii. 1—3.

^h Prov. xiv. 14.

ⁱ 1 Pet. iv. 10.

not thyself^k?" — — — And though no change has taken place in his intellect in reference to earthly things, his understanding becomes clouded in relation to spiritual things: his *gifts* in a great measure vanish together with his grace: he once could speak and pray with fluency; but now his mouth is shut; and he experiences the truth of that singular declaration, "From him that hath not (that hath not improved his talent) shall be taken away even that which he hath^l."

But it is observed of the salt, not only that it is "good for nothing," with respect to its primary uses of keeping other things from putrefaction, but that it is "not fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill^m." The fact is, that salt, when destitute of its proper qualities, has a tendency rather to produce sterility than to promote vegetation, if it be cast upon the land. This is intimated in many passages of Scriptureⁿ — — — And such is the effect produced by those who have lost the power of godliness, and departed from God: they cast a stumbling-block before men, and "cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of." The world may do what they please, and the individuals alone are blamed; but let any one who professes religion do any thing amiss, and religion itself must be accountable for it, and the name of God is blasphemed on his account. This indeed is most unreasonable and absurd: nevertheless so it is: and a most aggravated woe is thereby entailed on all who occasion such an offence^o.]

3. Their final acceptance—

[Even here they are rejected both by God and man. Those who walk consistently, are hated and despised by the ungodly world; but those who walk inconsistently, are despised a thousand times more; and this God has ordained as a just punishment for their treachery^p. As for his own abhorrence of them, it is scarcely possible for language to express it more strongly than he has declared it^q. Moreover, if they repent not, the same indignation will pursue them in the eternal world. What reception they will then meet with at his hands, he has plainly warned them^r." And the saints with whom they associated here, will then disown them, and cast them out of their society^s: yea, the very heathen who walked agreeably to the light that they enjoyed, will be admitted into bliss, whilst the lifeless professor of religion, who brought forth no fruit to perfection, will be banished from it with abhorrence^t: so true

^k Rom. ii. 21—24. ^l Matt. xiii. 12. ^m Luke xiv. 35.

ⁿ Judg. ix. 45. Jer. xvii. 6. Ezek. xlvii. 11. and particularly Ps. cvii. 34. the marginal reading. The *Salt Sea* is the *Dead Sea*.

^o Matt. xviii. 7.

^p Mal. ii. 8, 9.

^q Rev. iii. 15, 16.

^r Ps. l. 16—22.

^s Luke xiii. 28.

^t Rom. ii. 27.

is that expression in our text, "They shall be trodden under foot of men!"]

Seeing then that the power of godliness is of such importance, we CALL upon you all,

1. To seek it—

[It is not a lifeless formal religion that will avail for your salvation. The command of God to every one of us is, "Have salt in yourselves^u." The distinction between the true Christian and the self-deceiver is, that the one "*savours* the things of the Spirit," which the other does not^v." We must "delight ourselves in God," or it will be in vain to hope that ever He will delight in us.]

2. To preserve it—

[The "salt may soon lose its savour." Religion is not like the sculptor's work, which if left ever so long remains in the state it was: but like a stone rolled up a hill, which will descend again as soon as the impelling force is withdrawn. The stony-ground and thorny-ground hearers shew, that we are prone to depart from God, or to rest in a carnal state whilst maintaining outwardly a spiritual profession. It is a melancholy, and an undeniable fact, that many do "begin in the Spirit, and end in the flesh." Let us then "stir up the gift of God that is in us," as we would stir a languishing fire; that we "lose not the things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward^w."]

3. To diffuse it—

[We must never forget the office which God has assigned us in our respective spheres. The treasure committed to us earthen vessels, is not for ourselves only, but to enrich others. "Our speech should always be with grace seasoned with salt^x." Let us then exert ourselves to the utmost of our power to *instruct the rising generation* — — — to *reform the habits of the world* — — — to *send the Gospel to the Heathen* — — — and to impart to all within our reach the knowledge and salvation of God^a.]

^u Mark ix. 50.

^x Rom. viii. 5. *φρονοῦσιν*, *sapiunt*, Beza. See also Rom. ii. 28, 29.

^y 2 John, ver. 8.

^z Col. iv. 6. Eph. iv. 29.

^a If this be a subject for MISSIONS, or Bible Society, or Sunday Schools, or for *Visiting the Sick*, or *Reformation of Manners*, the appropriate idea should be exclusively insisted on.

MCCXCVI.

CHRISTIANS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

Matt. v. 14—16. *Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

IF we had not been authorized by God himself, we should never have presumed to designate the saints by such honourable appellations as are unreservedly given to them in the Scriptures. Of all the objects in the visible creation, the sun is the most glorious; nor is there any thing, either in this terraqueous globe or in the firmament of heaven, which does not partake of its benign influence: yet even to that are the saints compared; “Ye are the light of the world.”

That all the parts of our text may come easily and profitably under our view, we shall consider,

I. The office to which God has destined his people—

Strictly speaking, neither Prophets nor Apostles could arrogate to themselves the honour which is here in a subordinate sense conferred on all the saints: it belongs exclusively to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is “the Sun of Righteousness^a,” and who says of himself, “I am the light of the world^b.” St. John, speaking of the Baptist, (who was greater than all the prophets,) expressly declares, that “*he* was not that Light; but that *Christ* was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world^c.” In this view, the name of *stars* would rather befit us, because we shine only with a borrowed lustre; reflecting merely the rays which we have received from the Lord Jesus: but, as exhibiting to the world all the true light that is in it, God has been pleased to dignify us with that higher name, “The light of the world.” He has sent

^a Mal. iv. 2.

^b John viii. 12.

^c John i. 8, 9.

his people to fulfil that office in the *moral*, which the sun performs in the *natural* world.

1. He has qualified them for it—

[There is a light in their minds, which reason and philosophy cannot impart, and which no man can possess, unless it have been given from above^d. “God has shined into their hearts to give it them, even the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ^e.” This is that mystery which was hid from ages and from generations, but is now made manifest to the saints^f. The meanest of his people are in this respect wiser than the wisest of unenlightened men, because they are taught of God^g. We are aware that this is an offensive truth; and that the learned will ever reply in the language of the offended Pharisees, “Are we blind also^h?” But it is no less true at this day than it was in former ages, that “God has hid his Gospel from the wise and prudent, and revealed it unto babes; even so, for so it seemeth good in his sightⁱ.”

Now this qualifies his people to instruct others. It is possible enough that they may be very ignorant in all other things; but of these things “they have the witness in themselves^k,” and therefore are enabled to speak of them just as they do of the things about which they are daily conversant. They may not speak scientifically about their bodily feelings; but when they tell you of their wants and their supplies, or of the diseases and the remedies which they have found effectual to remove them, they know whereof they affirm. Thus respecting the great truths of the Gospel, they are enabled to speak from their own experience; and the greatest philosopher in the universe may sit at their feet and learn.]

2. He has ordained them to it—

[It is a favourite idea with many, that they are to be religious; but that their religion is not to be seen. Under the pretence of hating ostentation, they conform to every practice of the world, and are in no respect distinguishable from the mere decent moralist. But, when they think that a man may serve God faithfully, and yet avoid the notice of those around them, they only deceive their own souls. For,

In the first place, *they cannot do it if they would*. “A city that is set on an hill *cannot* be hid.” If whilst the world around them are “living after the flesh,” and “walking in the broad road that leadeth to destruction,” *they* “walk after the Spirit,”

^d 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^e 2 Cor. iv. 6.

^f Rom. xvi. 25, 26.

^g John vi. 45.

^h John ix. 39.

ⁱ Matt. xi. 25, 26.

^k 1 John v. 10.

and confine themselves to "the narrow way that leadeth unto life," how *can* it be that they should escape notice? Their whole spirit and temper and conduct differ from the world, as much as light from darkness. We will suppose, their light is but small; and if exhibited before the meridian sun, it might easily be overlooked; but the smallest taper attracts notice when shining in the midst of darkness: and this is precisely their case: the splendour of their conduct may not be such as of itself to command admiration; yet it cannot but be seen by reason of the surrounding darkness. But,

In the next place, *they ought not to do it if they could.* "Men do not light a candle to put it under a bushel, but to give light to all that are in the house:" nor does God "bring his people out of darkness into his marvellous light" solely for their own sakes, but "that they may shew forth the praises of Him that hath called them^l," and diffuse the light which they have received. They are bound therefore, by every tie of duty and gratitude, to make him known to others, and to advance, as much as possible, his glory in the world. Moreover, their fellow-creatures also have a claim upon them. Who that should see a blind man walking on the brink of a precipice, would not feel himself bound to warn him of his danger; and account himself guilty of a murderous cruelty towards him, if the man should perish through his neglect? If then we should feel it a duty to give him the advantage of our superior light in relation to his bodily welfare, how much more ought we to do it in relation to his soul! The command given to every enlightened soul, is, "Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee^m."]]

This leads us to speak of,

II. The duty resulting from it—

[That we are not to do any thing from ostentation or vain-glory is certain: whatever proceeds from such a principle is altogether hateful in the sight of God. They who seek the applause of man must expect no other reward. But we are not to be so restrained by these considerations as to decline that course of action which will bring glory to God. On the contrary, we should "make our light to shine before men," and "*so*" shine, as to compel all who behold it "to glorify our Father which is in heaven."

It may be asked, How can any conduct of ours accomplish this? I answer,

First, *it may shew men the unreasonableness of their prejudices.* All manner of prejudices are entertained against the Gospel; and all that we can *say* is insufficient to remove

^l 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^m Isai. lx. 1.

them. But what we *do* has a very powerful effect: it will often “put to silence the ignorance of foolish menⁿ,” and make them ashamed who falsely accuse our good conversation in Christ^o — — —

Next, *it may lead them to embrace the Gospel*. The Apostle speaks of husbands, who never would have attended to the written or preached word, being won by the good conversation of their wives^p. From the history of the Church in all ages, we know that there are many who owe their first impressions of religion to the consistent conduct of some eminent saint; nor can we doubt but that if the dispositions and character of religious people more uniformly corresponded with their holy profession, “the word would have an abundantly freer course,” and would be much sooner glorified throughout the world.

Lastly, *it cannot fail of stimulating many to increasing activity*. The force of example is exceeding great. Many, for want of associates in well-doing, are discouraged, and attempt but little, because they think that but little can be accomplished. But, when they see a person more abundant in labours than themselves, they are stirred up to a holy emulation; they blush at the view of their own unprofitableness, and whilst they are thankful to God who has given such grace unto men, they strive with redoubled ardour to serve and glorify their God.]

We shall CONCLUDE this subject with shewing,

1. How we may become lights to the world—

[Simple as this question may appear, there are few who would answer it aright. Almost all would propose to attain this distinction by *doing*; and would be shocked at being told that it must be attained by *believing*: yet that is the very way by which our blessed Lord has taught us to seek it: “Believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light^q.” This, of course, is not to be understood as though a bare assent to any truths whatever would sanctify the soul: it is to be understood as directing us to the Gospel, and to the Lord Jesus Christ as revealed in it. To believe in the light, is to look for salvation entirely through Him whom God has set forth to be a propitiation for sin; it is to live altogether by faith on him, and to make him our ALL *in all*. This would render our union with Christ productive; and would lead to our perfect renovation after the Divine image. Then should we “shine indeed as lights in a dark world^r,” and God himself would be glorified in us.]

ⁿ 1 Pet. ii. 15.

^q John xii. 36.

^o 1 Pet. iii. 16.

^r Phil. ii. 15, 16.

^p 1 Pet. iii. 1, 2.

2. What we should do if we have already attained that honour—

[Remember that the eyes of all are upon you, and that God's glory in the world is very greatly affected by your conduct. Any fault in you will soon be noticed by the world. They who pay little regard to the stars that shine in their orbits, will yet be observant enough of a falling star: and, in like manner, they who overlook the radiance of ten thousand saints, will mark with triumph the fall of a professor, and derive from it an argument against all serious religion. Be on your guard then against every thing which may either eclipse your light, or cause it to shine with diminished splendour — — — Be earnest also to get forward in your Christian course. The brightest of us emits only as yet the faint gleam of early dawn: "our profiting must continually appear;" and "our path be as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day"^s — — —]

^s Prov. iv. 18.

MCCXCVII.

THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS CONFIRMED BY CHRIST.

Matt. v. 17, 18. *Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.*

TO have just sentiments on religion is a matter of incalculable importance. Whilst we are mistaken respecting any fundamental truths, we not only lose the benefit and comfort of those truths, but are in danger of rejecting them when proposed to our consideration, and enlisting ourselves amongst the avowed enemies of the Gospel. The Jews were almost universally expecting a temporal Messiah. Hence, when our blessed Lord appeared in such mean circumstances, and inculcated doctrines so opposite to their carnal expectations, the people thought either that he was an impostor who deceived them, or that he was come to subvert and destroy all that had been delivered to them by their forefathers. Our blessed Lord anticipated and obviated their objections: "Think not,"

says he, "that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil."

By "the law and the prophets," I understand, that system of religion which the moral law inculcated, and all the prophets enforced. To establish and confirm these was the great end of our Saviour's advent. He has confirmed them as to the great scope of all that they have spoken in reference to,

I. The way of salvation—

The way of salvation, as revealed in the Old Testament, is by faith in the promised Messiah—

[The moral law proclaimed this. The moral law, it is true, said, "Do this and live^a." But it was never the intent of the moral law to put men upon working out their salvation by their obedience to its commands. The law could never give life to man since the fall. It could only shew him his duty, and thunder out its curses against him for his manifold transgressions. It required perfect and perpetual obedience; in default of which, it doomed him to everlasting destruction^b. Thus by its unbending severity it compelled every one that was under it to seek salvation in some other way. It shewed to men the necessity of a Saviour, and thus prepared them for the manifestation of Christ by the Gospel. This is the very account given of it by St. Paul, who sums up his testimony in these significant expressions, "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith^c."

The *ceremonial* law held forth the remedy, of which the *moral* law declared our need. All its sacrifices directed men to that great Sacrifice which should in due time be offered on the cross: whilst the brazen serpent, the scape-goat, and all the various lustrations, displayed the efficacy of that remedy, and encouraged penitents to accept it. That the ceremonial law was intended to answer this end, we are sure; because our Saviour himself and his Apostles constantly appealed to it, as prefiguring Christ, who is expressly said to be "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth^d."

Precisely to the same effect is the testimony of all the prophets. Who can read the 53d chapter of Isaiah, and not see that salvation is to be obtained through the atoning blood of Christ? We see him "wounded for our transgressions," and all "our iniquities laid on him," in order that we may be "healed by his stripes." Similar to this is the declaration

^a Rom. x. 5.

^b Deut. xxvii. 26. with Gal. iii. 10.

^c Gal. iii. 21—24.

^d Rom. x. 4.

of Daniel, who says, that Christ should "finish transgression, make an end of sin, and bring in an everlasting righteousness." In a word, "To him," says the Apostle, "*give all the Prophets witness*, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins^e:" and again, "The righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being *witnessed by the Law and the Prophets*, even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all them that believe^f."]

And what, we ask, is the way of salvation in the New Testament?

[Has the Lord Jesus Christ put aside this way of salvation? Has he not rather established it beyond all possibility of doubt? Hear his own words: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: *no man cometh unto the Father but by me.*" To cite all his declarations upon this subject would detain us too long: suffice it to say, that he speaks of his "blood as shed for the remission of sins," and "his life as given to be a ransom for many;" and declares, that, by being "lifted up upon the cross," he is qualified and empowered to "draw all men unto him."]

Thus far then we have seen that Christ has confirmed the law and the prophets, as far as relates to the way of salvation. Let us now mark the same in reference to,

II. The path of duty—

The ten commandments were given as a rule of conduct to the Jews—

[This summary of religious duties is emphatically called, 'The Law.' It was given by God in the most solemn manner, and enjoined without exception on the whole nation. The prophets, in their respective ages and places, maintained the authority of this law, and laboured to bring the people into a conformity to its precepts.]

And what other rule is there prescribed to us?

[The Lord Jesus Christ has neither added to the Ten Commandments, nor taken from them. He has freed them from the corrupt glosses of the Scribes and Pharisees, and has explained them according to their spiritual import. He has also specified certain duties which were not so clearly seen under the Mosaic dispensation, and has added new motives to the performance of them. But he has enjoined nothing which

^e Acts x. 43.

^f Rom. iii. 21, 22.

is not comprehended in one of those two commandments, that of "loving God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength," and that of loving our neighbour as ourselves. On the other hand, he has bound upon us these duties in the most solemn manner; and told us, that he will estimate our character, not by the zeal with which we "cry Lord, Lord," but by the care and uniformity with which we keep his commandments^g.

Here then is proof sufficient, that our Lord has not destroyed the law and the prophets, or in the slightest degree weakened our obligations to obey them. There are some professors of religion, and indeed not a few, who think that Christ has set aside the law as a rule of life. But they labour under a dangerous, yea, a fatal error. When they say that we are released from the law as a covenant of works, they are right: but so were believers under the Old Testament. When they say that we are released from the whole ceremonial law, they are right: but we must still observe every part of it in a spiritual manner, presenting Christ as our sacrifice, washing daily in the fountain of his blood, and "cleansing ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, that we may perfect holiness in the fear of God." But when they speak of being released from the law as a rule of life, they open the floodgates of licentiousness^h: and were it not that some of them, as we hope, have more piety in their practice than in their principles, they would have just reason to tremble for their stateⁱ. The truth is, that the advancing of our souls in holiness was a very principal object of Christ's incarnation and death^k. And "that very grace of God which bringeth salvation," so far from annulling any single command of God, itself "teacheth us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world."]

This subject is of peculiar use,

1. To rectify our views—

[As for those who think that salvation is by the works of the law, we shall pass them over on the present occasion; praying only that God may open their eyes ere it be too late. But there are many thoughtful and intelligent persons, and not altogether destitute of piety, who imagine, that Christ has lowered the demands of the moral law, and purchased for us the liberty of being saved by a new law of sincere obedience: they think that for his sake our sincere obedience will be

^g John xiv. 15, 21, 23.

ⁱ See ver. 19.

^h Rom. iii. 31.

^k Tit. ii. 14.

accepted, instead of perfect obedience : and that the defects of our obedience will be made up by the merits of Jesus Christ.

To such persons I would say, Read the words of our text. Christ says he did *not* come to destroy the law ; and you affirm that he *did* ; that he has softened its rigours, and dispensed with those high attainments which the perfect law of God requires. You will reply perhaps, If these things be not dispensed with, how are we to be saved ? I answer, They are not dispensed with, no, not one of them : it is as much our duty to fulfil the whole law of God as it was Adam's duty in Paradise : nor, if we would be saved by the law, can we be saved on any lower terms. But of salvation by the law we must not entertain a thought : we are condemned by the law, and must flee as condemned sinners to Jesus Christ, that he may wash us from our sins in his blood, and clothe us in his own unspotted robe of righteousness and salvation. Some will exclaim, What *new* doctrine is this ? I answer, this was the way of salvation revealed to Adam after the Fall ; and it has been continued in all successive ages, till Christ himself came. Then was this mystery more clearly revealed to the world ; and from henceforth the voice of God to every human Being is, " He that believeth on the Son of God hath eternal life ; but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."

Lay aside then your erroneous notions respecting a mitigated law and sincere obedience ; and seek salvation in God's only dear Son, in whom alone it can be found¹.]

2. To regulate our lives—

[Whilst some persons object to salvation by faith alone as a licentious doctrine, others complain of us as raising the standard of holiness so high, that none, except a few devotees, can possibly attain it. But I would ask these objectors, Which of God's laws are we authorized to set aside ? Which are we even suffered to palliate and soften ? Our blessed Lord has, with the strongest possible asseveration, said, that " not so much as a jot or tittle of the law shall ever pass away : " how then can *we* presume to say, It *shall* pass away ? Suppose *we* do lower the standard of obedience in compliance with your wishes, what will it profit you, unless HE do it also ? We should only deceive you, and ruin ourselves together with you. But you will say, ' It is hard to have so much required of us.' Well, suppose it be hard ; if it be required, we must do it : our only alternative is, to obey or perish. But " there is not any one of his commandments grievous : " on the contrary, they all together form " a light and easy yoke : " and so far are they from being

¹ Acts iv. 12. 1 Cor. iii. 11.

deemed too strict by any real Christian, that there is not a true Christian in the world that would wish any one of the commandments to require less than it does. A spiritual man does not complain of the strictness of the law, but of the wickedness of his own heart: and his desire is, not to have the commandments of God lowered to his attainments, but his attainments elevated to the utmost height of God's commandments.

Let this then be the desire and endeavour of us all: let there be no sin harboured, not even in thought; nor any duty neglected, whatever difficulties we may have to encounter, or whatever trials to endure. If we "have a hope of salvation through Christ, we must purify ourselves even as he is pure."]

MCCXCVIII.

THE DANGER OF LITTLE SINS.

Matt. v. 19. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

IT must be confessed, that amongst those who profess a high regard for the Gospel, there are some who speak of it in terms, which, to say the least, have an antinomian and licentious aspect. In their zeal against self-righteousness, they are apt to represent the law as altogether abolished: knowing that we are no longer under the law as a covenant, they express themselves as if we were freed from it also as a rule of life. But we must never forget that the Gospel is a "doctrine according to godliness;" and that "the law, so far from being made void through faith, is established by it." In the words preceding the text, our blessed Lord had said, that "he came not to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfil them: and in the words before us, he teaches us to infer from thence the undiminished authority of the sacred code.

To elucidate his assertions, we observe,

- I. That the commandments of God are universally to be obeyed—

It is certain that some commandments are of more importance than others—

[There can be no doubt but that the moral precepts, which are founded in our relation to God and to each other, are of more importance than the positive institutions, which are founded only in the sovereign will of God. Our Lord himself, comparing the divine institution of paying tithes with the exercise of judgment, mercy, and faith, calls the latter “the *weightier* matters of the law:” though at the same time he determines, “These ought ye to have done; and not to leave the other undone.”

The positive institutions may even be set aside, if they interfere with our discharge of moral duties. A strict observance of the Sabbath is enjoined: but, if a work of necessity or of mercy demand our attention, we are at liberty to engage in it, notwithstanding we thereby violate the sacred rest of the Sabbath: for God has said, “I will have mercy and not sacrifice.”

Indeed, even in the moral law itself, there is a difference between the duties of the first and of the second table; those which relate to God being more important than those which relate to man. Hence our Lord says, that “to love God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength, is the first and *great* commandment.”]

But the authority on which every one of them stands is the same—

[God is the great lawgiver: and whatever his command be, it is, as long as it is in force, binding upon all to whom it is given. We are no more at liberty to abrogate one than to set aside another. If we allowedly violate any one of them, we do, in effect, violate them all^a. If any two be absolutely incompatible, the positive precept, as I have observed, gives way, and ceases for the time to be a command. So if two moral precepts such as that of obeying a parent, and of obeying God, be irreconcilable, obedience to God is then of superior and paramount obligation. God himself has assigned limits to man’s authority, beyond which we are not commanded to obey him. Man cannot dispense with any of the divine commandments: they can be repealed by that authority only which first established them. Neither in theory nor in practice are we at liberty to make them void: we must both “do” them ourselves, “and teach” the observance of them to others. We must not add any thing to them, nor take any thing from them. The injunctions which God has given us on this head are strict and solemn^b: and, if we presume to violate them, it is at the peril of our souls^c.]

^a Jam. ii. 10, 11.

^b Prov. xxx. 5, 6. Deut. xii. 22.

^c Rev. xxii. 18, 19. Deut. xxvii. 26.

It is intimated that some will both “do and teach” them: which leads us to observe,

II. That an unreserved respect for all of them is characteristic of the true Christian—

Ungodly men have but little reverence for the divine commands—

[The Pharisees of old laid a far greater stress on ceremonial than on moral duties; on “washing pots and cups,” than on cleansing the heart: and they actually made void some of the commandments by their traditions^d. The Papists do the same at this day, denying the sacramental cup to the laity, commanding the consecrated wafer to be worshipped, and granting pardons and indulgences to those who are able to pay for them. Would to God that there were no such impieties among Protestants also! It is true, we do not acknowledge any power in the Pope to dispense with the laws of God: but we take the power into our own hands, and deal as freely with the commands of God as ever the Pope himself can do. One commandment is deemed uncertain, another unreasonable, another unnecessary; and all are reduced to the standard which we ourselves approve. As for the penalties with which they are enforced, “we puff at them,” and assure both ourselves and others that they shall never be executed.]

But the true Christian dares not thus to insult his God—

[It is his habit to “tremble at the word^e.” When once he hears, “Thus saith the Lord,” his mouth is shut; and he sets himself immediately to obey the divine command. Instead of complaining that “any commandment is grievous^f,” he loves the whole law; he accounts it “holy, and just, and good.” He would not have any part of it lowered in its demands on any account^g. His desire is rather to have his soul “cast into the very mould of the Gospel^h,” and to be transformed perfectly into the image of his God. His prayer is, “Let my heart be sound in thy statutes, that I be not ashamedⁱ :” let me “stand perfect and complete in all the will of God^k” — — —]

The Christian’s disposition towards the commands of God ought to be cultivated by every one of us, since it is certain—

III. That on such a respect for them depends our everlasting happiness—

^d Matt. xxiii. 25—28. and xv. 3—6.

^e Isai. lxvi. 2.

^f 1 John v. 3.

^g Ps. cxix. 128.

^h Rom. vi. 17. the Greek.

ⁱ Ps. cxix. 80.

^k Col. iv. 12. 2 Cor. vii. 1.

Nothing less than this will suffice to prove our sincerity—

[It is allowed, without any great difficulty, that heinous violations of God's law will affect our eternal state: but smaller transgressions are considered as of but little consequence. But this does not accord with our Lord's assertions in the text. There we are told that the breach of *one* single law will be fatal, yea, though it be *the least* of all the commandments of God. We are not to understand that the unintentional and unallowed defects in our obedience will prove fatal to us: for who then could be saved? but any evil which we *allow* and *justify*, or, as the text expresses it, which we “do and teach,” will certainly exclude us from the kingdom of heaven. The text might seem to import that such conduct would only diminish the degree of our happiness in heaven: but our Lord elsewhere warns us, that it will entirely exclude us from heaven; and that our only alternative is, either to part with sin altogether, or to suffer the penalty of sin, eternal death¹.]

But where obedience is unreserved, it will receive a glorious recompence from God—

[That there is no *merit* in our obedience, is allowed: but that our obedience shall receive a reward of grace, every page of the inspired volume declares — — — The more perfect our conformity to God's law, and the more energetic our maintenance of its authority have been, the higher testimonies of God's approbation we shall most assuredly receive; and our exaltation in heaven shall be proportionably “great.” Peculiar sanctity and zeal may subject us to reproach from men; but it will meet with honour from God: for he has said, “Them that honour me; I will honour.”]

LEARN then from hence the importance of,

1. A renewed heart—

[The unregenerate heart “neither is, nor can be subject to God's law^m.” We “must be born again,” and be “renewed in the spirit of our minds,” before we can truly say, “I delight to do thy will, O God; yea, thy law is within my heartⁿ.” — — — Let us then seek to be made “new creatures in Christ Jesus.” Then shall we be prepared both to “do” the commandments ourselves, and to “teach” them to those around us.]

2. A faithful ministry—

[Many, in fact, say unto their ministers, “Prophecy not unto us right things; prophecy unto us smooth things;

¹ Matt. xviii. 8, 9.

^m Rom. viii. 7.

ⁿ Ps. xl. 8.

prophesy deceits^o." But to what purpose would it be to comply with their wishes? In what could such ministrations end? "If the blind lead the blind, must they not both fall into the ditch?" On the contrary, if we "do" the whole revealed will of God, as far as we are enabled, "and teach" it faithfully unto others, we have reason to hope that we shall have many to be "our joy and crown of rejoicing" in the last day. Instead of complaining, then, that your minister is too strict either in his life or preaching, be thankful that you have a minister, who desires to live for no other purpose than "to save himself and them that hear him."]

3. A pure conscience—

[“Who can understand his errors?” says David; “O cleanse thou me from my secret faults.” Truly it is no easy thing to be a Christian. Let us examine carefully whether there be not some secret unsubdued lust within us, some worm at the root of our gourd. If there be, woe unto us; “Except we repent, we shall surely perish.” If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things: but if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God^p.” “Then shall we not be ashamed, when we have respect unto all his commandments^q.”]

^o Isai. xxx. 10.

^p 1 John iii. 20, 21.

^q Ps. cxix. 6.

MCCXCIX.

EVANGELIC AND PHARISAIC RIGHTEOUSNESS COMPARED.

Matt. v. 20. *For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

IT would be a gratification to many to know the lowest degree of piety that would suffice for their admission into the kingdom of heaven. But to have such a line drawn for us, would be by no means profitable: for it may well be doubted, whether any, who under present circumstances are slothful in their pursuit of holiness, would be quickened by it; and there is reason to fear that the zeal of many would be damped. Information, however, of a nature not very dissimilar, is given us; and it will be found of the highest importance to every child of man. Our blessed Lord has marked out for us a line, that must

be passed by all who would be numbered amongst his true disciples. There were certain characters, very numerous among the Jews, characters much contemplated and much admired; these, he tells us, must be surpassed. To equal the most exalted among them will not suffice: our righteousness must exceed theirs, if ever we would enter into the kingdom of heaven. The persons we refer to were the Scribes and Pharisees; the former of whom were the learned teachers and expositors of the law; the latter were a sect who affected peculiar sanctity, and were regarded by the people as the most distinguished patterns of piety and virtue. The two were generally associated together in the Scriptures; because the Scribes, though not necessarily, yet, for the most part, belonged to the sect of the Pharisees: and, so united, they were considered as having all the learning and piety of the nation concentrated in them. But, notwithstanding the high estimation in which they were held, our Lord most solemnly affirmed that none of them could, in their present state, be admitted into heaven; and that all who would be counted worthy of that honour, must attain a higher righteousness than theirs.

This information, I say, is valuable; because, though it is not so definite as to encourage any to sit down contented with their attainments, it serves as a standard by which we may *try* our attainments, and a criterion whereby we may judge of our real state.

In investigating the subject, there are two things to be considered;

I. *Wherein* our righteousness must exceed theirs; and,

II. *Why* it must exceed theirs.

I. To prepare the way for shewing *wherein* our righteousness is to exceed theirs, we must begin with stating, as clearly as we can, what righteousness they possessed. But in doing this, we shall be careful neither to exalt their character too much on the one hand, nor to depress it too much on the other. Indeed, precision in this part of our statement is of

peculiar importance; for, as a comparison is instituted between their righteousness and ours, we are concerned to have the clearest knowledge of that by which our estimate must be formed. Their character was a mixture of good and evil. They had much which might be considered as righteousness; and at the same time they had great defects. Their righteousness, such as it was, was seen; their defects were unseen: their righteousness consisted in acts; their defects, in motives and principles: their righteousness was that which rendered them objects of admiration to men; their defects made them objects of abhorrence to God.

Let us begin with viewing the favourable side of their character. And here we cannot do better than refer to the account which the Pharisee gives of himself, when addressing the Most High God; and which our Lord particularly adverts to, as characterizing the more distinguished members of their community. After thanking God that he was “not as other men are,” he first tells us what he had *not done*: he was “not an extortioner,” nor could be accused by any man of demanding, on any account whatever, more than was his due. He was “not unjust” in any of his dealings, but, whether in commercial transactions, or in any other way, he had done to all as he would be done unto^a. “Nor was he an adulterer:” common as the crime of adultery was among the Jews, and great as his advantages had been for insinuating himself into the affections of others, he had never availed himself of any opportunity to seduce his neighbour’s wife. In short, he had avoided all those evils, which the generality of publicans and sinners committed without remorse.

He next proceeds to specify what he *had done*. He had “fasted twice every week,” in order to fulfil the duties of mortification and self-denial. He had been so scrupulously exact in paying his tithes, that not even “mint, or rue,” or the smallest herb in his

^a Such as “oppressing the hireling in his wages,” &c. The expression must of course be confined to *acts of justice*.

garden, had been withheld from God: "he paid tithes of all that he possessed^b."

From other parts of Scripture we learn, that the Pharisees were peculiarly jealous of the sacred rest of the Sabbath; insomuch that they were filled with indignation against any one, who, even by an act of the greatest necessity or mercy, should presume to violate it^c. They prayed to God also, and *that* not in a mere cursory manner, hurrying over a form which they got through as quick as possible: no; "they made long prayers, as well in the corners of their streets, as in the midst of their synagogues^d". As for the purifications appointed by the law, they were punctual in the observance of them: they even multiplied their lustrations far beyond what the law required; and were so partial to them, that they never came home from the market, or sat down to their meals, without washing their hands: they even wondered that any one who pretended to religion, could be so profane, as to eat without having first performed these important rites^e. Nor must we forget to mention, that they abounded in almsgivings; regarding themselves not so much the owners, as the stewards, of the property they possessed^f. In a word, religion, in all its visible branches, was, in their eyes, honourable; and, in token of their high regard for it, they made their phylacteries broader than any other sect, and "enlarged the fringes of their garments;" thus displaying before all men their zealous attachment to the laws of God^g. Nor were they content with thus fulfilling their own duties: they were desirous that all should honour God in like manner: persuaded that they themselves were right, they strove to the uttermost to recommend their tenets and practices to others, and would even "compass sea and land to make one proselyte^h."

Of course, the attainments of all were not exactly alike: some would excel more in one branch of duty,

^b Luke xviii. 11, 12.

^c Mark iii. 2, 5, 6.

^d Matt. vi. 5. and xxiii. 14.

^e Mark vii. 2—5.

^f Matt. vi. 2.

^g Matt. xxiii. 5.

^h Matt. xxiii. 15.

and others in another branch. St. Paul himself was of that sect, as his parents also had been before him; and he was as fair a specimen of them, as any that can be found in all the records of antiquity. He was, “as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the Church, (whom he considered as enemies to God;) and, as touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.”

Having thus ascertained what their righteousness was, we can now proceed to point out wherein ours must exceed it.

But here it will be proper to observe, that as all were not equally eminent in what may be called their righteousness, so, on the other hand, all were not equally faulty in the vicious part of their character. We must take the Pharisees as a body, (for it is in that view that our Saviour speaks of them in the text;) and must not be understood to impute to every individual the same precise degree either of praise or blame. Nor must we be considered as saying, that no one of that sect was ever saved: because, previous to the coming of our Lord, there doubtless were many who served God according to the light that they enjoyed: but this we must be understood distinctly to affirm, that no person who enjoys the clearer light of the Gospel, can be saved, unless he attain a better righteousness than the Scribes and Pharisees, as a body, ever did attain, or than any one of them, while he rejected the Gospel, could possibly attain.

I am well aware, that, when we consider their fastings, their prayers, their alms-deeds, their strict observances of all the ritual laws, together with their zeal in promoting the religion they professed; and take into the account also, that they were free from many of the more gross and common sins; we shall seem to have left no room for superiority in our obedience. But, whatever may be thought of their attainments, our righteousness must exceed theirs: it must exceed theirs, first, in *the nature and extent* of it; and next, in *the principle and end* of it.

First, In the nature and extent of it—

From what has been already spoken, it sufficiently appears, that the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees was for the most part external and ceremonial; or, where it seemed to partake of that which was internal and moral, it was merely of a negative kind, and extremely partial in its operation. Now the Christian's righteousness must be totally different from this: it must be internal and spiritual: it must descend into the heart, and have respect to the whole of God's revealed will. The true Christian will affix no limits to his exertions; he will set no bounds to his heavenly desires. He does not limit the commandments to their literal sense, but enters into their spiritual import, and considers a disposition to commit sin as nearly equivalent to the actual commission of it. He considers himself as accountable to God for every inclination, affection, appetite; and endeavours not only to have their general tendencies regulated according to his law, but to have "every thought brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." In a word, he aspires after perfection of every kind: he desires to love God, as much as to be saved by him; and to mortify sin, as much as to escape punishment. Could he have his heart's desire, he would be "holy, as God himself is holy," and "perfect, as God himself is perfect."

Thus, in the *nature and extent* of the two kinds of righteousness, there is an immense difference: nor is there a less difference in their *principle and end*.

Would we know what was the *principle* from which the Pharisaic righteousness proceeded? We can assert, on the most unquestionable authority, even that of Christ himself, that "all their works they did to be seen of menⁱ." And St. Paul no less strongly marks the *end*, to which all their zeal was directed. He confesses that "they had a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge: for, being ignorant of God's righteousness, they went about to establish their own righteousness, and would not submit themselves unto the righteousness of God^k." In these respects then we

ⁱ Matt. xxiii. 5.

^k Rom. x. 2, 3.

must differ from them. We should *shun ostentation* and vain-glory, as much as we would the most enormous crimes. We should bear in mind, that any thing done with a view to man's applause, is altogether worthless in the sight of God : whatever it be, we have in the applause of men the reward we seek after, and the only reward that we shall ever obtain. We should also *dread self-righteousness*, as utterly inconsistent with a Christian state. St. Paul assures us, that "the Jews, who sought after the law of righteousness, did not attain to [any justifying] righteousness, because they sought it not by faith, but, as it were, by the works of the law ; for they stumbled at that stumbling-stone¹." The making of our own works the foundation of our hope towards God, argues a contempt of that "foundation which God has laid in Zion : " it thrusts out from his office the Lord Jesus Christ, " who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness," and who, from that very circumstance, is called, " The Lord our Righteousness." A truly Christian spirit will lead us, even "after we have done all that is commanded us, to say, We are unprofitable servants, we have done that [only] which it was our duty to do." See this exemplified in the Apostle Paul, than whom there never was but one brighter example of piety in the world : he, after all his eminent attainments, " desired to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness which was of the law, but the righteousness which is of God by faith in Christ^m."

Now then, compare the righteousness of the two parties ; the one, "cleansing carefully indeed and superstitiously, the outside of the cup and platter, whilst within they were full of many unsubdued lusts ;" the other, allowing not so much as an evil thought, but "cleansing themselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and perfecting holiness in the fear of God : " the one filled with a high conceit of their own goodness, and claiming heaven itself on account of it, whilst they aimed at nothing but the applause of man ; the other, in the

¹ Rom. ix. 31, 32.

^m Phil. iii. 9.

midst of their most strenuous exertions to serve and honour God, renouncing all dependence on themselves, and “glorying only in the cross of Christ:” the one, a compound of pride, unbelief, and hypocrisy; the other, of humility, and faith, and heavenly-mindedness. Whatever may be thought by those who know not how to appreciate the motives and principles of men, we do not hesitate to apply to these parties the distinctive characters assigned them by Solomon, and to say, that “Wisdom excelleth folly, as much as light excelleth darkness.”

II. If now we proceed to the second point of our inquiry, and ask, *Why* our righteousness must exceed theirs? the text furnishes us with a sufficient answer: If we be no better than they, the Lord Jesus assures us, “that we shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Under the expression, “The kingdom of heaven,” both the kingdom of grace on earth, and the kingdom of glory in heaven, must be comprehended; for they are, in fact, the same kingdom; and the subjects in both are the same: only in the one, they are in an infantine and imperfect state, whereas, in the other, they have attained maturity and perfection: but from both shall we be alike excluded, if we possess not a better righteousness than theirs: the Lord Jesus will no more acknowledge us as his disciples here, than he will admit us into his beatific presence hereafter.

We cannot then without this be partakers of the *kingdom of grace*. The Lord Jesus Christ has told us plainly, that he does not regard those who merely “say unto him, Lord! Lord!” however clamorous they may be, or ostentatious of their zeal for him: he approves of those only “who do the will of his Father which is in heaven.” We may assume the name of his disciples, and be numbered amongst them by others; we may associate ourselves with them, as Judas did, and be as little suspected of hypocrisy as he; we may even deceive ourselves as well as others, and be as confident that we are Abraham’s children as

ⁿ Eccl. ii. 13.

ever the Pharisees of old were ; we may, like them, be quite indignant to have our wisdom and goodness called in question ; “ Are we blind also ? ” “ in so saying, thou condemnest us : ” But all this will not make us Christians. A sepulchre may be whitened and rendered beautiful in its outward appearance ; but it will be a sepulchre still ; and its interior contents will be as lothesome as those of a common grave. It is to little purpose to “ have the form of godliness, if we have not the power ; ” to “ have a name to live, whilst yet we are really dead.” God will not judge of us by our profession, but our practice : “ Then are ye my friends,” says our Lord, “ if ye do whatsoever I command you.” To this effect is that declaration also of the Psalmist : having asked, “ Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord ? or who shall stand in his holy place ? ” he answers, “ He that hath clean hands, and a *pure heart*.” The truth is, that those whom Christ will acknowledge as his disciples, have been “ born again ; ” they are “ renewed in the spirit of their minds ; ” “ they are new creatures ; old things are passed away, and all things are become new : ” they have been taught the spirituality and extent of God’s law ; to know, that an angry word is murder, and an impure desire adultery ; and in that glass they have seen themselves guilty, polluted, and condemned sinners : they have been stirred up by this view of themselves to flee unto Christ for refuge, as to the hope set before them in the Gospel : having “ found peace with God through the blood of his cross,” they devote themselves unfeignedly to his service, and strive to “ glorify him with their bodies and their spirits, which are his.” *Here is the true secret of their obedience ;* “ The love of Christ constraineth them ; because they thus judge, that, if one died for all, then were all dead : and that he died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him that died for them and rose again.” This is conversion ; this is regeneration ; this is what every Scribe and Pharisee must be brought to : even Nicodemus, “ a master in Israel,” must become a disciple

of Christ in this way: for our Lord declared to him in the most solemn manner, that, “unless he should be [thus] born again, he could not enter into the kingdom of God.”

The same is true in relation to the *kingdom of glory*. Whilst we are in this world, the tares and the wheat, which grow together, may so resemble each other, that they cannot be separated by human sagacity. The Jewish tares (as I myself know by ocular inspection) cannot, even when full grown, be immediately distinguished from wheat by a common observer^o: the difference, however, is soon found by rubbing the ears, which in the one are nearly empty, and in the other are full of grain. The same may be noticed also in the religious world. Not only common observers, but even those who have the deepest insight into characters, and the best discernment of spirits, may be deceived; but God can never be deceived:

^o The learned are not agreed what the *ζιζάνια* were. Parkhurst's account of them, in his Lexicon, is, that they were “a kind of plant, in appearance not unlike corn or wheat, having at first the same kind of stalk, and the same viridity; but bringing forth no fruit, at least none good.” Macknight is precisely of the same opinion. Linnæus, speaking of that very species which the author here refers to, designates them as the *zizania*. Later botanists deny that that plant grew in Judæa; and represent it as of American growth. Whether Linnæus was right, is no part of the author's intention to discuss. He merely mentions the fact, that he has seen (in a green-house at Bristol), and had in his own possession an ear of it for some months, till incredulous persons rubbed it to pieces, that plant, which Linnæus identifies with the *zizania* of Judæa; which in our Translation of the Bible, is called *tares*; and which, though to all appearance useless and unproductive, may easily be mistaken for wheat in full ear. In this view, whatever it be called, it illustrates his subject: and, if it be the *zizanium*, it reflects a beautiful light also upon the parable of the tares, Matt. xiii. Some indeed think, that because the servants distinguished the *zizania* from the wheat, there was no resemblance between them. But that argument is by no means conclusive: for the servants who were constantly habituated to the sight of tares and wheat, might easily discern that they were mixed in the field, whilst yet the difference might not be so great, but that a number of persons employed to pull them all up, might make innumerable mistakes, and root up much of the corn with them. The parable indeed *may be* explained without supposing any resemblance between the two; but such an interpretation destroys, in the author's apprehension, much of the force, and beauty, and importance of the parable.

however specious we may be in our outward appearance, he will discern our character through the thickest veil; "he searcheth the hearts, and trieth the reins;" or, as it is yet more strongly expressed, "he weigheth the spirits:" he knows exactly the qualities of which every action is compounded, and can separate, with infallible certainty, its constituent parts: and, when we shall stand before him in judgment, he will distinguish the upright Christian from the hypocritical and specious Pharisee, as easily "as a man divideth his sheep from the goats." Then shall the final separation take place; "the wheat shall be treasured up in the garner, and the tares shall be burnt with unquenchable fire." Here then is a further reason for the assertion in our text. If an outside religion would suffice, we might rest satisfied with it: but if we have a Judge, "whose eyes are as a flame of fire," to whom the most secret recesses of the heart are "naked and open," just as the inwards of the sacrifices were to the priest appointed to examine them; and if, as he has told us, "he will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart;" then must we be, not specious Pharisees, but real Christians, even "Israelites indeed, and without guile:" we must not be contented "with being Jews outwardly, but must be Jews inwardly, and have, not the mere circumcision of the flesh, but the inward circumcision of the heart, whose praise is not of men, but of God^p."

The peculiar importance of the subject, we hope, will plead our excuse, if we trespass somewhat longer than usual on your time. In our statement we have been as concise as would consist with a clear exposition of the truth. In our application of it we shall also study brevity, as far as the nature of the subject will admit. An audience habituated to reflection, like this, will never grudge a few additional moments for an investigation so solemn, so weighty, so interesting as the present.

1. The first description of persons, then, to whom

^p Rom. ii. 28, 29.

our subject is peculiarly applicable, and for whose benefit we are desirous to IMPROVE it, is that class of hearers who *come short* of the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees.

Many there are, it is to be feared, who, so far from “not being as other men are,” cannot at all be distinguished from the generality of those around them: who, instead of “fasting twice a week,” have never fasted twice, nor even once, in their whole lives, for the purpose of devoting themselves more solemnly to God: who, instead of “making long prayers,” never pray at all, or only in so slight, cursory, and formal a manner, as to shew that they have no pleasure in that holy exercise. Instead of keeping holy the sabbath-day, they “speak their own words, do their own work, and find their own pleasure,” almost as much as on other days; or if, for decency’s sake, they impose a little restraint upon themselves, they find it the most wearisome day of all the seven. Instead of paying tithes with scrupulous exactness, they will withhold the payment both of tithes and taxes, if they can do it without danger of detection; thus shewing, that they have not even a principle of honesty to “render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s.” Perhaps they may now and then give away somewhat in charity; but they do not consecrate a portion of their income to God as a religious act, nor even account it their duty so to do, notwithstanding “every man” is expressly commanded to “lay by him in store for charitable uses, according as God has prospered him.” Instead of being able to appeal to God that they have never been guilty of whoredom or adultery, they stand condemned for one, or both, of these things in their own consciences; or, if they do not, their chastity has proceeded from other causes, than either the fear of God, or the hatred of sin. Instead of honouring religion in the world, they have been ashamed of it, yea perhaps despised it, and held up to scorn and ridicule those who were its most distinguished advocates: thus, so far from labouring to proselyte

people to righteousness, they have used all their influence to deter men from it.

What shall we say then to these characters? Shall we encourage them with the hopes of heaven? Must we not rather adopt the Apostle's reasoning, "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" Yes; if the Pharisees, with all their righteousness, could not enter into heaven, how shall *they* come thither, who are destitute of their attainments? If every one must perish who does not exceed their righteousness, what must become of those who fall so short of it? O that this argument might have its proper weight amongst us! O that men would not trifle with their souls, on the very brink and precipice of eternity! "Consider, brethren, what I say; and the Lord give you understanding in all things!"

2. Next we would SOLICIT the attention of those who *are resting* in a Pharisaic righteousness. This is the kind of religion which is held in esteem by mankind at large. An outward reverence for the ordinances of religion, together with habits of temperance, justice, chastity, and benevolence, constitute what the world considers a perfect character. The description which St. Paul gives of himself previous to his conversion, is so congenial with their sentiments of perfection, that they would not hesitate to rest the salvation of their souls on his attainments. But what said he of his state, when once he came to view it aright? "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ; yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." He saw, that brokenness of heart for sin, a humble affiance in the Lord Jesus Christ, and an unreserved devotedness of heart to his service, were indispensable to the salvation of the soul. He saw, that, without these, no attainments would be of any avail; yea, that a man might have all the Biblical learning of the Scribes, and all the sanctified habits of the Pharisees, and yet never be approved of the Lord in this world, nor

ever be accepted of him in the world to come. Is it not then desirable, that those who are in repute for wisdom and piety amongst us, should pause, and inquire, Whether *their* righteousness really exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees? Would they not do well to study the account which St. Paul gives of himself previous to his conversion, and to examine wherein they surpass him? Alas! alas! we are exceedingly averse to be undeceived; but I would entreat every one of my hearers to consider deeply what our blessed Lord has spoken of such characters: "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God^a."

3. Lastly, we would SUGGEST some profitable considerations to those who *profess to have attained* that superior righteousness spoken of in our text.

You need not be told, that the examples of Christ and his Apostles, and indeed of all the primitive Christians, were offensive, rather than pleasing, to the Pharisees of old. The same disapprobation of real piety still lurks in the hearts of those who "occupy the seat of Moses^r:" and you must not wonder if your contrition be called gloom; your faith in Christ, presumption; your delight in his ways, enthusiasm; and your devotion to his service, preciseness or hypocrisy. Well, if it must be so, console yourselves with this, that you share the fate of all the saints that have gone before you; and that your state, with all the obloquy that attends it, is infinitely better than that of your revilers and persecutors: you may well be content to be despised by men, whilst you are conscious of the favour and approbation of God.

But take care that "you give no just occasion to the enemy to speak reproachfully." The world, and

^a Luke xvi. 15.

^r By this expression is meant, Those who professing, like the Pharisees, to reverence the Scriptures as the word of God, expound them as they did, and make use of them to discourage, rather than promote, real piety. But it is not to be limited to any *order* of men whatever.

especially those who resemble the Scribes and Pharisees, will watch your conduct narrowly, just as their forefathers did that of our Lord himself; and happy will they be to find occasion against you. As for your secret walk with God, they know nothing about it: your hopes and fears, and joys and sorrows, are nothing to them: these are the things which they deride as airy visions and enthusiastic cant. They will inquire into those things which come more under their own observation, and on which they set an exclusive value: they will inquire how you demean yourselves in your several relations of life; whether you are temperate in your habits, modest in your demeanour, punctual in your dealings, true to your word, regular in your duties, and diligent in your studies. They will point to many of their own followers as highly exemplary in all these particulars; and if they find you inferior to them in any respect, they will cast all the blame upon religion, and take occasion from your misconduct to confirm themselves in their prejudices. Permit me, then, to say to all my younger brethren, and especially to all who shew any respect for religion, that religion, if true and scriptural, is uniformly and universally operative; and that it is a shame to a religious person to be surpassed by a Pharisee in any duty whatsoever. Though I would be far from encouraging any of you to boast, I would entreat all of you so to act, that you may, if compelled by calumnies, adopt the language of the Apostle; "Are they Hebrews? so am I: Are they Israelites? so am I: Are they of the seed of Abraham? so am I: Are they ministers of Christ? I speak as a fool; I am more; in labours more abundant." Thus be ye also prepared to repel comparisons, or to turn them to your own advantage: and shew, that, in all the social and relative duties, and especially in those pertaining to you as students^s, you are "not a whit behind the chiefest among them;" but even in the things wherein they most value themselves, "the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour^t."

^s Preached before the University of Cambridge. ^t Prov. xii. 26.

MCCC.

CHRIST'S EXPOSITION OF THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT.

Matt. v. 21, 22. *Ye have heard that it was said by^a them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.*

GENERAL statements, and general invectives, rarely carry any conviction to the mind: they must be supported by an induction of particulars, before they can produce any material effect. Assertions without proofs will be taken for calumny; but, when supported by fact, they will bear down all opposition. The assertions of our blessed Lord, indeed, needed no confirmation; because "he knew what was in man;" and because his miracles were a sufficient attestation to his word. Yet even He condescended to substantiate his accusations by appeals to fact.

He had intimated that the Scribes and Pharisees both did and taught many things contrary to his revealed will: and he had declared, that unless we have a better righteousness than theirs, we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. To evince the truth of his charge, and of the declaration founded upon it, he shews, that they had grossly perverted the sixth commandment: which on that account he proceeds to explain.

Let us consider,

I. His exposition of this commandment—

The commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," was one of those proclaimed from Mount Sinai, and written by the finger of God himself on tables of stone^b. An order was afterwards given, that the crime of murder should be invariably punished with the death of the offender^c. These two were by the Pharisees joined

^a It should rather be "*to*." See Whitby on the place.

^b Exod. xx. 13.

^c Numb. xxxv. 30, 31.

together, as though they had been one and the same commandment: "Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill, shall be in danger of the judgment." The effect of this union was, that, first, the *import* of the commandment was thereby limited to actual murder; and, next, the *sanction*, with which it was enforced, was limited to a punishment inflicted by the civil magistrate. Hence all other violations of the commandment were either overlooked, as no offences at all, or were considered as of very light moment: and though God's future judgment might not be expressly denied, it was at least kept very much out of sight, by this method of interpreting the word of God.

To rectify these errors, our Lord gave *his* exposition of the commandment. He explained,

1. Its import—

[It had been thought to extend only to actual murder; but he declared, that it prohibited *all causeless anger in the heart, and all outward expression of it with the lips.*

In determining the sinfulness of anger, two things are to be considered, namely, the *object*, and the *occasion* of our anger. The only legitimate *object* of it is sin. The sinner himself should be regarded with love and pity; and his sin only should move our anger. Thus it was with our blessed Lord when he exercised anger; "He looked round about on the Pharisees with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts^d." The *occasion* too must be just: our anger must not be causeless, or disproportionate to the offence, or of too long continuance. Where our anger is faulty in none of these respects, we observe the true medium; "We are angry, and sin not^e:" but where any one of these barriers is broken down, there the anger becomes a violation of the sixth commandment.

Similar distinctions must be made respecting the outward expressions of anger. "Raca" was a term which indicated a contempt of the person to whom it was applied: it means, 'Thou empty worthless fellow.' "Thou fool," was an expression that implied a great degree of indignation and abhorrence, 'Thou reprobate villain.' Such expressions therefore as these must of necessity be considered as violations of the commandment, because they manifest a total want of love and pity towards the person so addressed. But it is not every reproachful word that is sinful. St. Paul said, "O foolish

^d Mark iii. 5.

^e Eph. iv. 26.

Galatians:” “are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?” St. James makes use of a similar expression; “Wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?” Our blessed Lord spake occasionally with far greater severity: “O fools, and blind;” “ye hypocrites;” “ye serpents and generation of vipers.” But in these things he spake as a prophet, bearing special authority; and consequently, unless specially authorized like him, we are not at liberty in these respects to follow his example. The rule for us is plain: we may, like the Apostles, designate the characters of men by appropriate epithets; but we must never use any expression which implies a hatred or contempt of the person to whom it is addressed. If we do not strictly adhere to this rule, we violate the commandment.

Thus you see the *import* of the commandment. Let us next consider our Lord’s explanation of,]

2. Its sanctions—

[We have observed, that the Pharisees, in their comments on this commandment, insisted almost exclusively on the temporal punishment annexed to the violation of it. Our Lord shewed them, that the principal judgments would be felt in the eternal world; and that not only the direct act of murder, but all those other evils which he had represented as breaches of the commandment, would there meet with deserved punishment. This he illustrated by a reference to the different kinds of punishment which were inflicted in their courts of justice. There were courts, established in different parts of the land, consisting of twenty-three members, who had power to try causes, and to inflict capital punishment on the guilty: and the persons condemned by them, were *beheaded*. There was also a great court or council, called the Sanhedrim, consisting of seventy-two members, who took cognizance of the greatest crimes: and the persons condemned by them were *stoned*. But there were some offences for which people were condemned to be *burnt alive*^g: and these, it is thought, were executed in the valley of Hinnom. In that valley the people formerly had burned their children in sacrifice to Moloch: but, when the people were turned from that wicked idolatry, one method adopted for keeping them from returning to it was, to defile the place as much as possible, and to render it detestable in the eyes of the people. For this purpose, all the filth of the city was carried there to be consumed; and fires were kept there on purpose to consume it: and it is probable, that that spot was selected as the fittest place of execution for all who were sentenced to be burnt alive. Now it is plain, that, of these three kinds of death, the last is far the most terrible:

^f Gal. iii. 1, 3.

^g Lev. xx. 14. and xxi. 9.

stoning was a more lingering death than beheading, and burning was still worse than stoning. A similar kind of gradation there will be in the punishments inflicted in the eternal world. Death, eternal death, will be the portion of all who die in their sins: but some will have a lighter, and others a heavier, weight of misery to sustain, in proportion to their respective degrees of guilt. "Those who are angry with their brother without a cause, will be in danger of the judgment," that is, of that lighter degree of misery, which may be compared to *beheading*. Those who suffer their anger to "break out into contemptuous expressions," and "say to their brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council," and sustain a heavier punishment, answerable to *stoning*. And if any person shall entertain such rancour in his heart as to "say to his brother, Thou fool, he shall be in danger of hell fire," that is, of that heaviest of all punishments, answerable to the being *burnt alive* in the valley of Hinnom: hell fire being usually expressed, in the New Testament, by a word importing, "The fire in the land of Hinnom^h."

Thus our Lord shews what are to be regarded as violations of this commandment, and that every violation of it shall receive a recompence proportionable to its enormity.]

Having seen his exposition of the commandment, let us consider,

II. The general instruction which it conveys to us—

With the right exposition of the commandments every truth of the Gospel is intimately connected. We may LEARN from this especially,

1. The spirituality of the law—

[The law is not a mere letter, which imports nothing beyond the literal import of the words, but extends to all the thoughts and dispositions of the heart. It prohibits all tendencies towards the sin forbidden, and enjoins every virtue that is opposed to it. St. Paul speaks of this as a thing known and acknowledged; "We *know* that the law is spiritualⁱ." In his unconverted state, indeed, he did not know it: he had the same view of the commandments as other Pharisees had, and thought he had never violated them, at least not so as to be condemned by them: but when God shewed him the meaning of those words, "Thou shalt not covet," he saw that "the commandment" was, as David had long before represented it, "exceeding broad^k:" he saw that there was not an inclination of the mind, or an affection of the heart, which was not under its

^h See Doddridge's note on the text.

ⁱ Rom. vii. 14.

^k Ps. cxix. 96.

cognizance and controul; and, consequently, that he had violated it in ten thousand instances. This is the account which he himself gives us of his own experience: "I was alive without the law once; but, when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died¹;" that is, 'Before I understood the law, I thought I had kept it, and should be saved by it; but when I saw its spirituality and extent, I was sensible that I was a condemned sinner, and could never be justified by my obedience to it.'

It is remarkable, that God has taught us this very lesson from the commandment before us. Moses was the meekest man upon earth: yet on one occasion he transgressed against this commandment, and spake unadvisedly with his lips: "*Ye rebels, shall we fetch you water out of this rock?*" and then, in his anger, he struck the rock *twice*. Now for this single transgression God excluded him from the earthly Canaan^m. And what was the import of this dispensation? It was intended to teach us, that the law is violated as much by an angry word or temper, as by murder itself; that one single violation of it is sufficient to exclude us from the land of promise; and that, though it is of excellent use to conduct us through the wilderness, it can never bring us into Canaan: *that* is the work of Joshua, and of Joshua alone. Let us then learn this important lesson from the commandment before us; and be convinced, that there is no justification for us by the works of the law.]

2. The evil and danger of bad tempers—

[It is thought in general a sufficient excuse for passion, to say, that we are naturally quick and hasty; and, if a man do not long retain his anger, this hastiness of spirit is not considered, either by himself or others, as any great blemish in his character. But God does not judge so, when he tells us, that anger in the heart exposes us to his heavy displeasure, and that the saying to our brother 'Raca' puts us in danger of hell fire. Surely we must have very little considered the effects of anger, if we can think so light of the criminality attaching to it. See what murderous *purposes* issued from it in the heart of Davidⁿ! — — — and what infernal *acts* were executed in consequence of it by the incensed sons of Jacob^o! — — — Or let us look nearer home, and see how often it terminates in blows, in duels, and in death. Who will say, that "the feet of an angry man are not swift to shed blood?" If nothing but the declarations of God himself will satisfy us, let us attend to them: "He that hateth his brother, is a murderer; and

¹ Rom. vii. 7, 9.

^m Compare Numb. xx. 10—12. with Ps. cvi. 32, 33.

ⁿ 1 Sam. xxv. 32, 33.

^o Gen. xxxiv. 13, 25—31. with xlix. 5—7.

ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him^p:" and again, "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain^q."

Hear ye then, ye "dealers in proud wrath;" hear what God himself speaks concerning you! Think it not a light matter to be angry with your wife, and children, and servants, on every occasion; and to be of such an irritable temper, that the smallest thing in the world suffices to put you in a passion. Whatever professions you may make of regard for religion, God tells you "not to deceive yourselves;" for that "no railer or reviler shall enter into his kingdom^r:" and such a disgrace does he consider you to his religion, that he bids his own people "not so much as to eat with you^s."

You will say, "It is only with the lower class of people that I am angry; to my equals I am courteous enough." What then, is not one man your "brother," as well as another? Go and murder a poor man; and see whether the laws of the land will make any distinction: and, if they will not, much less will "God, with whom there is no respect of persons." If you indulge anger in your heart, and express it with your lips, "hell fire" will be your portion, whatever be your own rank, and whether the objects of your anger be poor or rich.

If you would be Christians indeed, your habitual conduct must be agreeable to that precept; "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you^t."

3. The greatness of the Gospel salvation—

[Let any one judge himself by our Lord's exposition of this commandment, and see how often he has been "in danger of the judgment, and the council; yea, and of hell-fire itself." Yet here is only one commandment; and that too considered only in a very partial way. What then must be the amount of our guilt, when tried by *all* the commandments? And if such be the guilt of every individual amongst us, what must be the guilt of the whole world? Yet this was the guilt which was laid upon the Lord Jesus Christ, and was expiated by his all-atoning sacrifice! How "mighty then must He be on whom such help was laid^u!" and how precious must that blood be which could wash away such loads of guilt! We do not in general consider this as we ought: if we did, we could not but be filled with wonder at the stupendous plan which the Father laid, the Son executed, the Spirit revealed.

^p 1 John iii. 15.

^q Jam. i. 26.

^r 1 Cor. vi. 10

^s 1 Cor. v. 10.

^t Eph. iv. 31, 32.

^u Ps. lxxxix. 19.

It is the full view of this subject that animates the heavenly hosts to sing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing:" therefore, "blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever^x." And were we also to meditate more on these things, we should oftener catch the fire, and sing with enraptured hearts "the song of Moses and the Lamb^y."]

^x Rev. v. 12, 13.

^y Rev. xv. 3.

MCCCI.

THE NECESSITY OF SEEKING RECONCILIATION WITH MEN.

Matt. v. 23, 24. *Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.*

THE explanation which our Lord has given us of the sixth commandment, shews, that we are not to confine the import of the commandments to the mere letter of them, but to regard them as extending to the words of our lips, and the dispositions of our hearts. Nor must we imagine that they are intended solely to prohibit sin: they must be understood as inculcating all those virtues which are opposed to the sin forbidden. This is evident from the connexion in which our text stands with the preceding context. Our blessed Lord had declared, that a wrathful word was in fact a species and degree of murder: and from thence he takes occasion to inculcate the necessity of exercising in every respect a spirit of love, so as, not only to entertain no anger in one's own heart against others, but so as not to leave room for the exercise of it in the hearts of others towards us. The direction which he gives us respecting it will lead us to shew,

I. The duty of seeking reconciliation with men—

Wild beasts are scarcely more prone to injure their own species, than man is to oppress and injure his fellow-man. Indeed, considering what tempers we

have, and what tempers exist in others, and what frequent occasions of interference with each other must of necessity arise, it would be a miracle if any of us had so conducted himself on all occasions, that no brother should on any account "have ought against him." We apprehend that no one who knows any thing of his own heart, would profess himself so perfect, as never to have done towards another any thing differently from what he would have wished to be done towards himself. Supposing then that "a brother have ought against us," what is to be done? I answer,

1. We should be willing to see our fault—

[There is in us a self-love, which blinds our eyes, and prevents us from seeing our own defects. Whatever relates to ourselves, we view in a partial light; so that we scarce ever attach any material blame to ourselves. Every one complains of the injuries he receives, but not of the injuries he commits. Take the report of mankind respecting each other, and the world is full of injuries; but take each person's report of himself, and no occasion of complaint will be found to exist. But it would be far better to put ourselves in the place of those who are offended with us; and, instead of extenuating our own offences and aggravating theirs, to view the extenuations of theirs, and the aggravations of our own. *This* would be doing as we would be done unto; and, if the habit of it were universal, it would soon root out all contention from the world.]

2. We should be ready to ask pardon for it—

[This is a condescension to which men in general are very averse to stoop. They would regard it as an act of meanness and cowardice; and therefore, even when conscious that they are wrong, they will rather risk the loss of their lives than submit to it. But no man should be ashamed to make a suitable apology for any offence he may have committed. When the friends of Job had, even with a good intention, criminated him on account of supposed hypocrisy, God was incensed against them for their uncharitable conduct, and ordered them to make their acknowledgments to Job himself, and to entreat his intercession in their behalf. It was no excuse for them that they had been mistaken, or that they had intended well, or even that they had been actuated by a zeal for God: they had wounded the feelings, and defamed the character, of Job; and if ever they would obtain forgiveness from God, they must

first of all ask forgiveness from their injured friend^a. Thus must we do: it is an act of justice which we owe to man; and an act of obedience which we owe to God.]

3. We should be desirous to make reparation for it—

[This was expressly required under the law^b: and it was practised under the Gospel. No sooner was Zaccheus converted to the faith, than he engaged to restore fourfold to any person whom in his unconverted state he had defrauded^c. And it is in vain to affect penitence, if we be not unfeignedly determined to make reparation, as far as is in our power, for any injury we may have done. Who would give credit to a man for penitence, whilst he wilfully retained the goods that he had stolen? Sincere contrition would urge him to undo whatever he had done amiss. And the same principle would produce the same effects in every person under heaven.]

Such is our duty towards an offended brother.
We now proceed to state,

II. The importance of it in order to our acceptance with God—

The command here given, to suspend the exercise of a solemn duty to God till we shall have performed this duty to man, shews,

1. That no duties whatever can supersede the necessity of it—

[It is here taken for granted, that men will bring their gifts to God's altar, or, in other words, will draw nigh to him in the use of all his appointed ordinances. But will works of piety procure us a dispensation from the duties of the second table? Will the making of long prayers be any compensation for devouring widows' houses; or the paying tithe of mint and anise and cummin atone for neglecting the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and truth? No such commutation will be admitted by God; no such reserves allowed: his word to us, under all such circumstances, is, "These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."]

2. That no duties whatever will be accepted without it—

[A person is represented here as already with his offering before God's altar. But what says the word of God unto him? 'Finish thine offering to me, and then go and be reconciled to thy brother?' No: it is, "Go thy way;" depart from my

^a Job xlii. 7, 8.

^b Lev. vi. 2—6.

^c Luke xix. 8.

altar; leave thy gift there, that it may be ready for thee to offer when thou art reconciled to thy brother: but do not for a moment think of approaching me with acceptance, whilst thy brother's rights are overlooked. "The prayer of the upright is doubtless God's delight:" but, when presented by one who "regards iniquity in his heart, it not only shall not be heard," but it shall be held in utter "abomination^d." Hear how solemnly God protests against all such hypocritical services^e — — It is not in the power of words to express more sovereign contempt, or more rooted abhorrence, of such services, than is conveyed in these passages: and we may be assured, that if we attempt to draw nigh to God, either at his table or at the footstool of his grace, he will spurn us from him with indignation. Let us be ever so urgent in our supplications, his only answer will be, "Go thy way."

Let us not however be misunderstood on this subject: we are not to imagine, that the circumstance of our being at variance with a brother is any excuse for staying away from the Lord's table: (it were strange indeed if a want of love to man would excuse a want of piety to God:) this is certainly not the meaning of our text: the meaning is, that, as we cannot be accepted of God in such a state, it becomes us without delay to seek reconciliation with our offended brother.]

From this subject we may LEARN,

1. The necessity of frequent self-examination—

[It is here supposed that a person may be living in the exercise of religious duties, and, without being conscious of his danger, may be in a state wherein neither his person nor his services can be accepted of God: he goes to the altar of his God as usual, and there recollects that his brother has some cause of complaint against him. Alas! there are many such self-deceiving people in the Christian world at this time. But how terrible! and they continue in their delusions till God himself shall bring their sins to remembrance at his judgment-seat! How dreadful will it then be to be told, "Go thy way!" Let us then live in the habit of daily self-examination: let us not leave any of our ways unnoticed, lest some hidden evil remain unrepented of, and "separate between us and our God" for ever. Especially when about to come to the supper of our Lord, let us try our ways with more than common jealousy, according to that advice of the Apostle, "Let a man examine himself, and so let him come^f." Let us go back to our early days, and ask, Whom have we offended? whom defrauded? whom calumniated? whom encouraged in the ways

^d Prov. xv. 8. and xxi. 27. ^e Isai. i. 11—15. Amos v. 21—24.

^f 1 Cor. xi. 28.

of sin, or discouraged in the ways of piety and virtue? And, whilst we are careful to wash away our stains in the Fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, let us be no less careful to obtain forgiveness of man, and to remedy the evils which we are unable to recall.]

2. The necessity of cultivating a humble spirit—

[It is pride which renders us so averse to ask forgiveness of a fellow-creature. But we have no alternative: if we will not seek reconciliation with an offended brother, we shall not obtain it with an offended God. Let us only get our spirits humbled with a sense of sin, and all the difficulty will vanish. We shall even feel a pleasure in making any acknowledgment which may tend to restore harmony and love. Even, if we are not conscious of having given any just occasion of offence, we shall not be satisfied, whilst we see a brother alienated from us: we shall be anxious to find the cause of his displeasure; to explain any thing which he may have misapprehended, and alter any thing he may have disapproved. In short, if the Gospel had its due effect upon us, we should, as far as our influence extended, convert this wilderness into another Paradise. Our “swords would immediately be turned into ploughshares;” and “the wolf and the lamb would dwell together” in perfect amity: there would be “none to hurt or to destroy in all God’s holy mountain.” O that we could see such a state existing all around us! Let us at least endeavour to produce it in our respective circles. Let us appreciate as we ought the comfort of love, and the excellency of a Christian spirit. And let us seek that “wisdom from above, which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy^g.”]

^g Jam. iii. 17.

MCCCII.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SEEKING RECONCILIATION WITH GOD.

Matt. v. 25, 26. *Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.*

IT is thought by many, that prudential considerations are unworthy the attention of a Christian. That he ought to be influenced by higher principles,

we readily admit. The love of Christ should be to him in the place of all other incentives, so far at least that he should not *need* any other motive for doing the will of God. But Christians are men, and feel the force of every principle which can operate upon the human mind: and therefore subordinate motives may fitly be proposed to them in aid of those which are more worthy of their regard. Our blessed Lord, having explained the sixth commandment, inculcates the duties contained in it, particularly that of seeking reconciliation with an offended brother: and this he does, first from the consideration of *the offence* which a want of a conciliatory spirit gives to *God*, and next from a consideration of *the danger* to which it exposes *ourselves*. In the former view we have treated of it in the foregoing verses; in the latter view we are to speak of it at this time. But the peculiarly emphatic manner in which our Lord speaks in the words before us, will naturally, and almost necessarily, lead our thoughts beyond the mere concerns of time, to another tribunal before which we must all appear. We shall therefore consider our text,

I. In its primary and literal sense—

When we have by any means offended a brother, we should not defer the period of making proper concessions, but should make them “quickly:” the danger of delay is great: for,

1. The breach may become irreparable—

[When we have excited a painful feeling in the breast of another, or even injured him in a considerable degree, we may by instantaneous concessions abate at least, if not entirely remove, his anger. But the longer he is suffered to pore over the injuries he has sustained, the more his wound festers, and indignation rankles in his bosom. Continued pondering over the misconduct of the offending person brings to his recollection a multitude of incidents, which under other circumstances would have been overlooked, but, viewed through the medium of anger, are magnified into importance, and regarded as aggravations of the offence committed. Thus an aversion to make acknowledgments on the one side begets inflexibility on the other; and that which might have passed away as a slight and transient dispute, becomes a ground of bitter alienation and rooted

aversion. To prevent this, we should strive to make up the matter "while we are in the way with him." Instead of separating immediately, as is usually the case, and avoiding all means of friendly communication, we should labour to prevent matters from coming to an extremity: and set ourselves in the first instance to procure a reconciliation, precisely as we would to extinguish a fire that threatened to consume our house: we should not stop till the flames had gained an irresistible ascendant; but should set ourselves first to quench the fire, and afterwards guard against the occasions of future conflagration.]

2. The consequences may be fatal—

[Our Lord supposes a person so irritated as to have determined to prosecute us in a court of law: and he supposes that the offence has been such as, when judgment is given against us, will terminate in our ruin; the compensation awarded him, and the costs of the suit, exceeding our power to discharge, we shall be cast into prison, and be liberated from thence no more.

This is a consequence which not unfrequently happens for want of timely humiliation in the offending party. But where measures are not pursued to such an extent, the disagreement may yet be attended with most calamitous effects. And it will be well for us to remember, that, though the persons we may offend may not be able to avenge themselves in that precise way, there is no person who may not at some time or other have it in his power to do us an essential injury: and therefore, though it is but a poor motive for a Christian to act upon, we may not improperly bear it in mind, as a subordinate consideration, to keep us from giving offence to any, and to stir us up to adopt the most prompt and effectual means of reconciliation with any whom we may have chanced to provoke.]

That our subject may be more generally interesting, we shall consider the text,

II. In a secondary and accommodated sense—

Notwithstanding the Apostles occasionally quote the Scriptures in a secondary and accommodated sense, we would be very cautious in taking such a liberty with the word of God. But we can scarcely conceive that our Lord had not some reference to the future judgment, when the Supreme Judge of all will execute on every unhumbled sinner the punishment he deserves. Though our offences be primarily against our fellow-creature, HE will take cognizance of them at the last day, if we have not sought forgiveness in this life, as well at the hand of our offended

brother, as at his hands. But since we cannot absolutely affirm that this *is* the sense of our text, we are contented to call it an *accommodated* sense; more especially because, in this latter sense, we consider *God* as the offended party, no less than the Judge who takes cognizance of the offence. Let not this, however, be thought a great liberty, because *HE* is really the offended party, whether our transgression be immediately against man or not; and, as we have observed, he will bring *every* work into judgment, whomsoever it might affect in the first instance.

With this apology we shall consider our text as prescribing a rule of conduct for us towards God no less than towards our fellow-creatures: and this we may well do; for,

1. Our duty is the same

[We have all offended God, and *that* in instances without number. To humble ourselves before him is our bounden duty. This would be our duty, though no means of reconciliation had been provided for us: but when God has sent his only-begotten Son to make an atonement for our sins, that so we might be brought into a state of reconciliation with him in a way consistent with the honour of his law and of his moral government, we should be inexcusable indeed if we should delay to seek him one single moment. The ingratitude which such conduct would argue, would aggravate our past offences beyond measure — — —]

2. The reasons for it are the same—

["We are yet in the way with him." Though we are hastening to the judgment-seat of Christ, we are not yet arrived there: and there is yet time for reconciliation with our offended God — — — This time however will be very short; how short we know not: we are advancing towards his tribunal every day and hour — — — But, if once the matter is brought before the Judge, all hope of mercy and forgiveness will be past: justice must then be dispensed according to the strict letter of the law — — — The sentence that will then be decreed will be unalterably fixed for ever: so far from "paying the last farthing" of our debt, we shall never be able to pay one farthing: and consequently must endure the penalty of our sins for ever and ever. Who can reflect on the awfulness of that prison, and yet continue one hour in an unreconciled state? — — — Consider the solemnity with which our Lord warns us against

delay, and lose not another moment in imploring mercy at the hands of God.]

REFLECTIONS—

1. Of what value in the sight of God is brotherly love!

[If we were to judge by the little regard shewn to it by men, we should account it of no value: but God declares, that whatever we may *have*, or *do*, or *suffer*, if destitute of this, we are no better than sounding brass, or tinkling cymbals^a. As far as we are possessed of this, so far we resemble him^b: as far as we are destitute of it, we resemble “the devil, who was a murderer from the beginning^c.” Let us cultivate to the uttermost this heavenly grace — — —]

2. How happy would the world be if Christianity universally prevailed!

[“Love is the fulfilling both of the law” and the Gospel too. If the Gospel reigned in the hearts of all, “Judah would no more vex Ephraim, nor would Ephraim envy Judah.” All would be harmony and peace throughout the world. To prove the blessedness of such a state, I need only appeal to those, who have felt at any time the disquietudes arising from anger and contention, and have at last been enabled to re-unite with their brother in cordial amity and affection. What a difference is there in your feelings! Instead of being harassed with incessant vexation, how are you now filled with tranquillity and joy! If then we have nothing more than our own happiness in view, we should, “as much as lieth in us, live peaceably with all men” — — —]

3. How earnest should we be in preparing for the future judgment!

[*There*, not overt actions only, but tempers and dispositions, will be strictly investigated: and a sentence will be passed upon us, founded on the moral state of our *minds*. Let us not trifle in a matter of such importance. Let us not be satisfied with saying, “I forgive all;” but let us inquire whether there be any person of whom we have not asked forgiveness? — — — Our proud hearts are very averse to stoop; but if we do not humble ourselves now before God and man, the time will come when we shall “find no place of repentance, though we should seek it carefully with tears^d.”]

^a 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.

^b 1 John iv. 7, 8, 16.

^c 1 John iii. 14, 15. with John viii. 44.

^d Heb. xii. 17. Matt. xxv. 10—12.

MCCCIII.

OUR LORD'S EXPOSITION OF THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT.

Matt. v. 27, 28. *Ye have heard that it was said by [to] them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.*

THAT the Jews were unacquainted with the spiritual nature of their law, we do not wonder; because their authorized instructors were chiefly occupied in ceremonial observances; but that Christians should be ignorant of it, is astonishing, since the strongest light has been cast upon it in the New Testament, and every minister of Christ must make it known, in order to state with accuracy the scope and excellence of the Gospel. Yet it is certain that few Christians comparatively have just views of the law: and it is to be feared, that, in many instances, ministers themselves are not sufficiently aware of the importance of setting it before their people in all its spirituality and extent. The exposition of it which our Lord has given us in this sermon, precludes all possibility of doubt respecting its real import. In the words which we have now read, he interprets the seventh commandment: in discoursing upon which, it will be proper to consider,

I. Its true import—

The Scribes and Pharisees imagined that the prohibition reached no further than to the actual commission of adultery; but our Lord shews that it extended,

1. To mental as well as bodily impurity—

[The intent of God's law is, to regulate our hearts. It can never be supposed that God should require us to "cleanse the outside of the cup and platter," and leave us at liberty to retain all manner of uncleanness within. He surely will not be satisfied with seeing us like "whited sepulchres." He forbids an evil desire no less than an evil act^a: and especially in relation to the evil we are considering, he specifies every variety of it as alike hateful in his eyes: "adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness," are all distinctly mentioned

^a Rom. vii. 7.

as "works of the flesh," which equally exclude us from the kingdom of God^b. Of course, the law does not condemn that attachment which is cherished in order to an honourable marriage; but all desires which have not respect to that, it does condemn.

We forbear to enlarge upon the subject, wishing rather to commend it to your consciences before God; but we entreat you all attentively to consider what have been the workings of your own hearts on different occasions, when perhaps you little thought what construction God put upon them, and in what light you were viewed by him^c.]

2. To the means and occasions of impurity, as well as to impurity itself—

[It is needless to observe, that the eye and the ear are inlets to evil, and that they need to be subjected to continual restraints. Our blessed Lord declares, that even a look, when employed for the purpose of exciting an impure desire, or when productive of that effect, involves the soul in guilt, no less than adultery itself. And St. Peter speaks of persons having "eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin." If the eye then may bring so much defilement on the soul, what shall we say of frequenting those places of public amusement, where every thing that is seen and heard has a direct tendency to corrupt the mind? What shall we say of suffering our minds to be contaminated with light and frothy novels, with indecent pictures, with licentious conversation, or indeed with sensual thoughts? Can any one who allows himself in such liberties as these, acquit himself of the charge which is brought against him in the text? Nor are they less criminal, whose dress is framed for this unhallowed end, and who sacrifice both decency and health to the detested purpose of inflaming the appetites of men. It is obvious, that, whether we are the tempters, or the tempted, we are highly criminal: however the imagination becomes defiled, that defilement constitutes us guilty in the sight of God.]

Such being the view which our Lord himself gives us of the commandment, we proceed to consider,

II. The effect which our Lord's exposition of it should produce upon us—

Were the commandment restricted to its literal meaning, we might find cause perhaps for self-com-

^b Gal. v. 19, 21.

^c On such a subject as this, the utmost possible delicacy must be observed.

placency in relation to it. But when it is rightly interpreted, it affords to all of us abundant occasion for,

1. Humiliation—

["Who will say, My heart is clean, I am pure from this sin?" Who, if an adulteress were now to be stoned to death, would take up the first stone to cast at her? Who must not retire self-convicted, and self-condemned? If then we would know what ought to be our feelings before God, we have here an image whereby they may be illustrated in the clearest manner. Conceive a woman who has for many years maintained an honourable character, betrayed at last into a forgetfulness of her marriage vows, and exposed to all the shame which her misconduct has justly brought upon her: how degraded would she be in her own eyes! how ashamed would she be to appear in the presence of her injured husband! how would she even lothe her own existence, and hate the light which would expose her to public view! Such consciousness should we feel in the presence of our God, even when our conduct has been most blameless in the sight of men. We should take to ourselves our proper character; and, knowing what abominations the omniscient God has seen within us, we should humble ourselves before him, and lothe ourselves in dust and ashes. We should put our hands on our mouths, and "our mouths in the dust," "crying, Unclean, unclean!"]

2. Gratitude—

[Many instances there are of persons, who, in former times, have been as moral in their habits as any of us, who yet, through the violence of temptation, have fallen, and brought indelible disgrace upon their names and families. Whence is it, we would ask, that this has not been *our* lot? Is it that *we* have never found any disposition to commit the evils which have ruined *them*? Is it that we are not actually chargeable with those very evils in the sight of God, who identifies the desire with the act itself? Or rather, is it not owing to the kind providence of God, who has screened us from temptation, or interposed in some way to break its force and rescue us from its power? We may perhaps be ready to ascribe our safety to a good education, and other secondary causes: but, if the First Great Cause had not rendered them effectual, they would have been as unavailing for us, as they have been for thousands all around us. Doubtless we have reason to be thankful for the restraints of education, for a dread of public shame, yea even for the laws of the land also: all of these have had their weight, when perhaps other barriers might have been broken down: we have reason therefore to be thankful for them. But especially have we cause to bless our God for the checks

of conscience, if at any time the progress of evil has been impeded by them. Whatever have been the means of preserving us from the actual commission of iniquity, the true source of our deliverance is the same: it must ultimately be traced to the providence or grace of God; and all the glory must be given to our heavenly Benefactor.]

3. Circumspection—

[When we consider how many temptations to evil present themselves to us on every side, and what depraved appetites lurk within us, we shall see reason to maintain continual vigilance and circumspection. It was wise in Job, who “made a covenant with his eyes, that he would not even look upon a maid^d.” And Solomon has wisely cautioned us to let our eyes look strait forward^e. If we regarded only the danger of falling into open sin, this advice would be good: but when we reflect on our Lord’s assertion, that an impure look will be considered by Almighty God as actual adultery, we had need to be on our guard against the very first assaults of evil: we should “watch and pray, that we enter not into temptation:” we should “keep,” not our feet only, but “our hearts also, with all diligence; knowing that out of them are the issues of life.” Remember then what we have already spoken respecting the *means and occasions* of impurity. Guard against the *books*, the *places*, the *company*, the *conversation*, that you have at any time perceived to be defiling to your souls. Be as careful of catching infection from those around you, as you would be if they were disordered with the plague. Go not into the world, without carrying with you, as an antidote, the fear of God. Come not from your intercourse with the world, without washing away your defilements in “the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness.” Be on your guard also against your *secret thoughts*; remembering, that God is “a discerner of the thoughts and intents of your hearts,” and that he will bring every secret thing into judgment, whether it be good or evil.” It is awful to reflect, what evils will be disclosed in the last day, and what fearful judgments will be denounced on many, who in this world were reputed chaste. May God enable us all to walk as in his immediate presence; and give us such a measure of his grace, as shall “sanctify us wholly,” and “preserve us blameless unto his heavenly kingdom!”]

^d Job xxxi. 1.

^e Prov. iv. 25.

MCCCIV.

THE NECESSITY OF MORTIFYING EVERY SIN.

Matt. v. 29, 30. *If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.*

MANY of the precepts of our holy religion are so strict, that persons indisposed to obey them are ready to turn away from them in despair, exclaiming, "This is an hard saying; who can hear it?" But must we on that account keep back the truth, or lower the commands of God to the habits and inclinations of men? Must we not rather "declare the whole counsel of God," and enforce to the uttermost the authority of his word? Our blessed Lord has set us an example in this respect; an example which all his servants must follow. He had declared, that an impure look was, in God's estimation, constructive adultery. To this it might be objected, that our constitution, rather than our will, was chargeable with this offence. But our Lord shuts out at once all objections of this kind, by saying, that even a right eye or a right hand must be parted with, rather than that we should suffer them to lead us to the commission of any sin; and that, if we refuse to sacrifice any thing for his sake, eternal misery will be our merited and inevitable portion.

In his words there are two things to be noticed:

I. The alternative proposed—

It is here supposed, that we have, both within us and without, many things which may operate as incitements to sin. And experience proves that this is really the case: there is not a faculty of our minds, or a member of our bodies, which may not become an occasion of evil; nor is there any thing around us which may not administer fuel to the flames of corruption that are within us. Beauty has

a tendency to create unhallowed desires; splendour, to call forth envy and ambition; and plenty, to promote intemperance.

But our Lord sets before us an alternative, either to turn away from those things which are occasions of evil, or to suffer the displeasure of an angry God in hell.

Now this is,

1. An only alternative—

[Nothing less will suffice on our part; nor will any diminution of punishment be admitted on God's part. It is to no purpose to urge, that the evil disposition which we harbour is but small, or that it is in a manner necessary to our happiness: if it is as dear as a right eye, or as necessary as a right hand, it must be sacrificed. Nor is there any intermediate state, like that of purgatory, to which small offenders can be consigned. As there is no medium between the renunciation of sin and the allowance of it, so there is no middle state between heaven and hell. The alternative is clear, definite, irreversible^a. You cannot be "Christ's, unless you crucify the flesh, with the affections and lusts^b."

It is worthy of observation, that our Lord does not *affirm* that the retaining of a right hand or eye will ensure eternal punishment; but he *takes it for granted*; he considers it as an acknowledged truth: yea, even before the resurrection of the body had been fully revealed, he considers *that* also as acknowledged; he takes for granted that the body, as well as the soul, shall be a subject of happiness or misery in the eternal world; and he assumes this truth as the ground of his argument. There can be no doubt therefore but that "the whole body will be cast into hell," if any one member of it be made an instrument or occasion of sin.]

2. A desirable alternative—

[It may seem strange to represent such an alternative as desirable: but it is really so: for a permission to harbour one unmortified lust would be like a permission to drink so much poison, or to retain one disorder preying upon our vitals. But this is not all. Sin, if allowed any part in our affections, will strive for mastery, and never cease, till it has attained an undisputed dominion. It is a leprosy which will overspread the whole man; "a canker which will eat," till it has consumed us utterly. Is it not desirable then to have it altogether eradicated, and to be compelled to wage incessant war against it?

^a Rom viii. 13.

^b Gal. v. 24.

Were there any other alternative allowed us, we should want a sufficient stimulus to exertion: we should be apt to side with the traitor, and, for the sake of present ease or gratification, to neglect our true interests. But, when there is no other choice given us, but either to mortify every sinful propensity, or to suffer eternal misery in hell, we are constrained to gird ourselves to the battle, and to “fight without intermission the good fight of faith.”]

3. A necessary alternative—

[This alternative is no arbitrary imposition to which we are subjected without necessity: it arises out of the very nature of things. God himself could not alter it consistently with his own perfections: he could no more give license to his creatures to harbour sin, or decline punishing it if harboured, than he could cease to be holy, or to have a due respect for the honour of his law. But supposing he were to cancel this alternative, and to admit to the regions of bliss a person who retained one bosom lust, it would be of no avail; for heaven to such a person would not be heaven. Place a man here at a royal banquet; set before him every thing that can please the appetite; let him hear the sweetest melody that ever charmed the ear; let all around him be as full of happiness as their hearts can hold; what enjoyment of it would he have, whilst “a thorn was in his eye?” We do not hesitate to say, that darkness and solitude would to him be far preferable to all this gaiety and splendour. And precisely thus would it be to one who should be admitted into heaven, whilst one unmortified sin was yet rankling in his bosom.]

What to do under such circumstances we learn from,

II. The advice given—

The advice is simply this, To mortify sin without reserve—

[It is here allowed, that the mortification of sin is a difficult and painful work, like the destruction of an eye, or the excision of a hand. But still it must be done. Of course, the language of our text is not to be taken literally: the maiming of the body, though it might incapacitate that individual member for the commission of sin, would effect nothing towards the eradicating of sin from the heart. We must understand the text as referring to the dispositions of the mind, and to the things which call forth those dispositions into exercise. Do *our connexions* draw us aside from the path of duty? Are we beguiled by their example, or intimidated by their authority? We must learn to withstand their influence, and to submit either to their hatred or contempt, rather than be betrayed by

them into any thing that is displeasing to God. Doubtless, we should do every thing in our power to conciliate them; but if nothing but a dereliction of duty will satisfy them, we must be prepared with meekness to reply, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." Do *our interests* betray us into sin? Are we engaged in a trade which we cannot carry on without doing things which our consciences condemn? Or have we prospects in life which must be sacrificed, if we will follow the Lord fully? There must be no hesitation on this point: we must pluck out the right eye, and cut off the right hand, and "*cast them from us*" with abhorrence, rather than suffer them to warp our judgment, and defile our conscience.

Are *our passions* the occasions of sin? We must learn to subdue them by fasting and prayer, and to restrain the gratification of them to the limits which God himself has assigned. We must "mortify our members upon earth," and "crucify the whole body of sin^c."

Let it not be said, We require too much. It is not man, but God, that requires these things: and he has promised that "his grace shall be sufficient for us;" so that, however the work may exceed all human power, we need not be discouraged: we are authorized, every one of us, to say with the Apostle, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me." Only "walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh^d."

The argument with which this advice is enforced, is such as no human being can withstand—

[We have before observed, that our Lord assumes this as an acknowledged and indisputable truth, namely, that eternal misery in hell must be the consequence of indulging one single sin. From hence he argues, that "it is expedient" to part with sin, rather than incur that tremendous punishment. *The pleasure of sin will surely be too dearly purchased at such a price as this.* Whatever we design to procure, we always consider what its value is: no man would give a large estate for a worthless insignificant bauble: nor would any man gratify his palate with a poisonous draught, which he knew would fill him with excruciating agony to the latest hour of his life. We grant then that sin is pleasant, just for the moment: but will that momentary enjoyment repay an eternity of misery, of such misery too as no imagination can conceive? We grant too that something may be gained by sin: but can the gain ever equal the loss that will be sustained? "If a man should gain the whole world, what would it profit him, if by that means he lost his own soul?"

^c Col. iii. 5. Rom. vi. 6.

^d Gal. v. 16.

Moreover, *the pain of mortifying sin can never be compared with that which will follow from the indulgence of it.* Be it so, the mortifying of sin is painful; but what are the sufferings of hell fire? Were the pain of self-denial a million times greater than it is, it is but for a moment: whereas the pains of hell are everlasting. Alas! who can think of *them*, and not tremble? Who can think of *them*, and hesitate one moment about the mortifying of sin? See what we do when informed that the retaining of a limb will endanger our lives: we suffer amputation, however painful it may be; and are glad to pay the person that will perform the operation for us. O let us be equally wise in relation to our souls!

From the contemplation of this argument then we most heartily concur in our Lord's advice: If your *connexions* ensnare you, renounce them; if your *interests*, sacrifice them; if your *passions*, get them subdued and mortified. Having your choice given you, learn, with Mary, to "choose the better part."]

We cannot CONCLUDE the subject without pointing out to you the importance,

1. Of ministerial faithfulness—

[It can be no pleasure to us to speak of "hell fire," and to alarm you with denouncing it as the portion of so great a multitude of our fellow-creatures. But what are we to do? What did our Lord himself do in the words before us? If we are silent, we cannot alter God's determinations: whether we tell you of it or not, this is the alternative which God has given you: we cannot reverse it; we cannot soften it; we cannot lower it to your wishes or attainments. We may deceive and ruin you by our silence; but we cannot benefit you at all: we shall only involve ourselves in your ruin. If indeed we have put a wrong construction on our text, then we are blameable for alarming you without reason: but yet, as long as we believe this to be the mind and will of God, we must declare it: "knowing, as we do, the terrors of the Lord, we must persuade men;" and you may at least derive this advantage from our warnings, namely, to be stirred up to a diligent inquiry after truth. But suppose our interpretation of the passage to be just, of what infinite importance to you is it to be rightly informed respecting it! How many of you may now escape the miseries of hell, who, but for this warning, might have been subjected to them for ever! Surely then, brethren, you are indebted to us for our fidelity. You cannot but know that such faithfulness is the parent of contempt and obloquy. But we would gladly endure infinitely more than ever we have endured, if only you would take heed to our words, and flee from the wrath to come. To all of you then we say, Be thankful

for the ministry that probes you to the quick, and that consults your benefit rather than your approbation.]

2. Of personal integrity—

[Self-love inclines us always to view ourselves more favourably than we ought. If we are conscious of some secret evil, we excuse ourselves as much as possible, in order to dissipate all fear of future punishment. If we hear *that* evil exposed, we are rather led to contemplate it in others, than to view it in ourselves: or if constrained to advert to our own case, we condemn the minister, either as personal, or as too severe. But what folly is this! If we had reason to apprehend that we had caught the plague, should we not be anxious to ascertain the truth, in order that we might counteract the infection, and escape its baneful effects? Why then are we not equally solicitous to know the state of our souls before God? Why will we shut our eyes against the light? What harm can arise from knowing what God has said concerning us? O put not from you, brethren, the word of life! Rather come hither, in order that you may be probed; in order that there may be no evil in you undiscovered. Examine yourselves with all imaginable care. Be afraid of nothing so much as being left in ignorance, and deceiving your own souls. When we speak the severest truths, apply them, not to others, but yourselves: take them as a light wherewith to search your own hearts: and beg of God to aid you by his Holy Spirit. Let David's prayer be ever on your lips: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be *any* wicked way in me; and lead me in the way everlasting."]

MCCCV.

DIVORCES FORBIDDEN.

Matt. v. 31, 32. *It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: but I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced, committeth adultery.*

THE laws of men cannot always proceed to the extent that might be wished in the support of truth and virtue. They must sometimes bend to circumstances, and tolerate evils which they cannot totally prevent. Even under the Theocracy itself this

necessity was felt and admitted. The laws of Moses, as far as they were purely *moral*, were perfect and inflexible ; but, as far as they were *political*, they yielded in a measure to the state and character of the people for whom they were made. The Jews were a hard-hearted and stiff-necked people, and extremely licentious in their manners. They would multiply their wives to any extent that they chose, and put them away on the most frivolous occasions. Moses knew that an absolute prohibition of such practices would only render the men more ferocious, and the women more miserable : and therefore he contented himself with laying some restrictions on the men, that if divorces could not be prevented, they might at least be rendered less frequent, by being made more solemn, more deliberate, more manifest. He limited the permission to those instances wherein there was in the woman some moral, natural, or acquired defect, which was the ground of her husband's alienation from her. He then ordered that a writing of divorcement should be drawn up, and in the presence of two witnesses be given to her ; that so, if she were afterwards married to another man, she might be able to prove that she was not living in adultery, because her former marriage had been annulled^a. This restriction, which was only a *permission* granted on account of the hardness of their hearts, was by the Scribes and Pharisees construed into a *command* to put away their wives, as soon as ever they ceased to love them : and, under cover of this law, the most licentious and cruel practices almost universally obtained. Our blessed Lord, who came to put all his followers under the authority of the *moral* law, and to reduce the world to its primeval sanctity, declared, that this license was contrary to the original institution of marriage ; and that henceforth, as Adam and Eve were formed for each other, and united in marriage, without any latitude allowed to either of them to dissolve the connexion, or to admit any other to a participation of their mutual rights, so should every man and woman, when

^a Deut. xxiv. 1.

united in wedlock, have an inalienable right in each other, a right that should never be cancelled, but by a violation of the marriage vows^b. To this subject our Lord was led by his exposition of the seventh commandment. He had shewn, that that commandment was no less violated by an impure look than by the act of adultery itself: and now he proceeds to shew, that those practices, which were supposed to be sanctioned by the Mosaic law, were never to be tolerated amongst his followers, since they were directly contrary to the spirit of that commandment. There was one, and only one reason, which should henceforth be admitted as a proper ground of divorce: and if any one in future should put away his wife in defiance of this restriction, he should be dealt with as an adulterer in the day of judgment.

The restriction itself being so clear and simple, we shall not attempt any further elucidation of it, but shall rather point out *the importance of the restriction to the welfare of mankind*.

I. It raises the female sex from the lowest state of degradation—

[Whilst men were at liberty to take, and to repudiate, as many wives as they pleased, the female sex were viewed in no other light than as females are regarded by the brute creation. Their moral and intellectual qualities were overlooked. Whatever distinguished them as a higher order of beings, was disregarded: their beauty only was deemed of any essential consequence; and they were valued only as means and instruments of licentious gratification. Consider the state of those whom Solomon and Rehoboam selected as ministers to their pleasures. Rehoboam had eighteen wives and sixty concubines^c. Solomon had seven hundred wives, and three hundred concubines^d. What can be conceived more humiliating than the state of all those women? all cut off from converse with men; all precluded from a possibility of filling that station in life, to which, in common with other females, they had been ordained. View those also who are selected for the choice of king Ahasuerus. Officers were appointed to gather together all the most beautiful young virgins throughout the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces of his empire: these were all to be purified with oil of myrrh and sweet odours for the space of a

^b Matt. xix. 3—9.

^c 2 Chron. xi. 21.

^d 1 Kings xi. 3.

whole year; and then in succession to be admitted to the king for one night, and never afterwards to see him, unless called for by name^e. Four years had the succession continued, before Esther's turn for admission to him arrived; and she, pleasing him beyond all the rest, was appointed Queen^f. How incredible does all this appear; that such a state of things should ever exist; that the parents should ever suffer it; and that the females should ever endure it! Were it reported in any other history than that which we know to be divine, we should never believe that the whole female sex would ever be reduced to such a state of horrible degradation as this.

But from this the Gospel raises them. By the restriction in our text, they are again elevated to the rank which the first woman sustained in Paradise. Though still inferior to the man in power and dignity^g, they possess equal rights with him. He has no more power to repudiate them, than they him. The wife has now the same property in her husband as he has in her^h: nor can any thing but a wilful alienation of it by infidelity on her part deprive her of it. If in one single instance he transfer to another those regards which by his nuptial vows were exclusively assigned to her, he shall be condemned for it by God, as certainly as she would be, if she were guilty of a similar transgression.]

II. It moderates the tempers and passions of men—

[Every one knows that power is a snare; and that it is difficult to possess unlimited authority without being sometimes led to exercise it in an unbecoming manner. Suppose a man at liberty to put away his wife whenever he chose, and to take whomsoever he would to fill her place; is it not probable that he would presume upon that power to tyrannize over her and oppress her? Is it not to be expected also that he would be easily captivated by youth and beauty, as soon as ever sickness or age should have robbed his wife of her former attractions? Under such circumstances, little could be hoped for, but inconstancy in affection, irritability in temper, licentiousness in manners, and cruelty in conduct. But by the restriction in our text all occasion for these things is cut off; and a necessity is imposed of cultivating dispositions directly opposite. A man when first he plights his troth to a virgin, knows that he takes her for better and for worse. He is aware that the knot can never be untied; and that his connexion with her forbids even a desire after any other. Hence then he sees the necessity of patience and forbearance towards her: he feels the importance of gaining her affections by kind usage:

^e Esth. ii. 3, 12, 13, 14.

^f Esth. ii. 15—17.

^g 1 Cor. xi. 3, 7—10.

^h 1 Cor. vii. 2—4.

and he determines, by contributing to her happiness as much as possible, to ensure his own. If any man think that the restriction operates unfavourably on him, let him compare the tumultuous passions of a lawless libertine with the chaste enjoyments of conjugal fidelity: and he will soon see the one is "like the crackling of thorns under a pot," whilst the other is a source of steady and increasing comfort to the latest hour of his life.]

III. It provides for the happiness of the rising generation—

[What must be the effect of that licentious intercourse of which we have spoken? Would men feel much regard for children whose mothers they had ignominiously dismissed? Would even the mothers themselves feel that regard for their children, which they would have done, if they had still retained the affections of their cruel father? The women, reduced to great extremities, would doubtless in many instances leave their children to perish with cold and hunger, if not put a period to their existence with their own hands.

But how different the condition of children under the present system! Now both the parents become their guardians, and equally exert themselves to make provision for them. They look upon their children as their dearest treasure; and expect from them their richest comforts. Hence they feel interested in imbuing their minds with Christian knowledge, and in regulating their conduct according to the Christian code. In short, their happiness being bound up in their offspring, they, for their own comfort's sake, instruct them in whatever is necessary to make them good members of society at least, if not also members of the Church above. We say not indeed that this effect *is* universally produced: but we do say, that the restriction in our text, if duly considered, has a direct tendency to produce it.]

From this view of our subject we may see,

1. How great are our obligations to Christianity!

[God, even under the law, bore strong testimony against the licentious cruelty of his peopleⁱ: but our Saviour has decided the point for ever. None can henceforth inflict, or suffer, such injuries as the Jews inflicted on their wives. Even those who have no regard whatever for religion, are partakers of these benefits, in common with the whole Church. Christianity has raised the tone of morals, and made those things infamous, which are approved and applauded where the light of the Gospel is not known — — — But if the ungodly and

ⁱ Mal. ii. 13—16.

unbelieving are thus benefited by the Gospel, how much more are they who feel its influence on all their conduct and conversation! They, knowing that the marriage union is indissoluble, set themselves to fulfil its duties; and in fulfilling them, are made truly happy. Behold a Christian family conducting themselves after this manner, and then you will see what Christianity has done for an ungodly world.]

2. How studious we should be to adorn its doctrines!

[In nothing is Christianity more seen than in the deportment of its votaries in relative and social life. It is easy for men to be on their guard when they are in company, and to demean themselves reverently in the house of God: but it is not easy for persons to be consistent in all their conduct amidst the various occurrences of domestic life. Here the tempers, if not restrained by grace, will break out: the husband will be imperious and harsh; or the wife will be fretful, querulous, and disobedient. Feeling a confidence that their respective weaknesses will be hid from public view, they shew them to each other without restraint. Beloved brethren, inquire whether this be not the case with you; and, if it be, learn to mortify these unhallowed tempers. The true way to adorn religion, is to propose to yourselves that image by which the marriage state is represented in the Gospel. It is compared to that union which subsists between the Lord Jesus Christ and his Church. The Church renders unto him all grateful obedience; whilst he exercises towards it the most self-denying and endearing affection. Thus should the wife be cheerfully obedient to her husband, even as to the Lord Jesus Christ himself, in every thing which is not contrary to the will of God: and the husband should account it his joy to manifest towards her all possible love, never exercising authority over her but with a view to her best interests and her truest happiness. Only let this be the pattern for your imitation, and you will never wish for a relaxation of that law whereby you are united to each other in an indissoluble bond. You will rather bless God that he has made the bond so strict; and you will avail yourselves of your mutual influence to advance in each other your spiritual and eternal interest, that, "as fellow-heirs of the grace of life," you may dwell together in heaven for evermore.]

MCCCVI.

SWEARING FORBIDDEN.

Matt. v. 33—37. *Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: but I say unto you,*

Swear not at all ; neither by heaven ; for it is God's throne : nor by the earth ; for it is his footstool : neither by Jerusalem ; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea ; Nay, nay : for whatsoever is more than these, cometh of evil.

AMONGST persons unaccustomed to hear the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel, a kind of jealousy is often excited by the very recital of the text ; especially if the preacher be known to be zealous for those doctrines, and the passage which he has selected evidently inculcates them. This feeling is manifestly wrong ; and every one who loves the Gospel sees in a moment the evil of indulging it. But is this feeling peculiar to those who are ignorant of the Gospel ? No ; by no means : for religious people themselves are too apt to yield to it, when any text is announced which leads only to the discussion of some moral subject. But if this feeling be wrong in the unenlightened part of mankind, it is a thousand times more so in those who profess to be enlightened, and who ought on that very account to love every portion of the sacred volume, and gladly to hear every truth insisted on in its season.

The subject of swearing does not seem to promise much edification to an audience conversant with the sublimer mysteries of our religion : but, if our blessed Lord saw fit to speak of it so fully in his Sermon on the Mount, we may be sure that our time cannot be misspent in investigating, as we purpose to do,

I. The nature and extent of the prohibition before us—

You must be aware that there is a very respectable body of people in this kingdom, who not only deny the lawfulness of oaths altogether, but make the abstaining from them an essential part of their religion ; insomuch that the legislature, which exacts an oath of all others, allows them to give their evidence in a way of simple assertion. Now these people understand the prohibition in our text as unlimited : whereas we consider it as limited.

To exhibit it in its true light, I shall shew,

1. To what it does not extend—

[It does not extend then to *oaths taken in a court of judicature*. This is evident from their being absolutely enjoined on many occasions by God himself^a — — — Moreover, our blessed Lord submitted to be examined upon oath; and, on being adjured by the living God, gave a reply, which nothing else could extort from him^b. And by his disciples also such an use of oaths is manifestly approved: it is said, that an oath for confirmation is an “end of all strife^c.” Now then I ask, would such kind of oaths have been commanded of God, taken by Christ, and approved by the Apostles, if there had been any thing necessarily and inherently wrong in them? We are well assured, that had they been in themselves morally evil, the use of them would never have been so sanctioned.

Nor does the prohibition absolutely extend to *the use of them on any other solemn occasion*. On some particular occasions they were imposed and taken by holy men of old. Abraham exacted an oath of his servant whom he sent to seek a wife for his son Isaac^d. Jacob took an oath of Joseph, as Joseph also did of the children of Israel, that they would carry up his bones to Canaan, and bury them in the promised land^e. And Jonathan made David swear to him to exercise tenderness towards his posterity, after that he should be seated on the throne of Israel^f. Under the New Testament, the most distinguished of all the Apostles very frequently made an appeal to God, when the subject was such as needed a solemn confirmation, and could not be confirmed in any other way^g — — —

Who that considers this statement can doubt for a moment the admissibility of oaths on such occasions as could not otherwise be satisfactorily determined?]

2. To what it does extend—

[The foregoing limitation is intimated even in the text: for though the words, “Swear not at all,” appear to be indefinite, yet it is plain that the prohibition was designed only to reach to such oaths as were used in common “conversation:” “Swear not; but let your *conversation* be Yea, yea, Nay, nay.”

Nevertheless the import of the prohibition is very extensive. It extends, first, to *all irreverent appeals to God*. The “taking of God’s holy name in vain” is forbidden in the third

^a Exod. xxii. 10, 11. Numb. v. 19—22. Deut. vi. 13.

^b Matt. xxvi. 63, 64. ^c Heb. vi. 16. ^d Gen. xxiv. 2, 3, 9.

^e Gen. xlvii. 29—31. and i. 25. ^f 1 Sam. xx. 14—17.

^g Rom. i. 9. and ix. 1. 2 Cor. i. 18, 23. and xi. 31. Gal. i. 20. Phil. i. 8.

commandment; which our blessed Lord is here rescuing from the false glosses of the Scribes and Pharisees. They thought that nothing but perjury was a violation of that commandment: but he informs them that all light mention of the name of God, and all irreverent appeals to him, were sinful. Well would it be, if they who customarily curse and swear, and they also who occasionally use the words "God knoweth," were sensible of the guilt which they contract!

The prohibition extends also to *all swearing by the creature*. The Jews had a much greater reverence for the name of God than the generality of Christians have. Being averse to mention that, they invented an inferior kind of oaths, and swore "by heaven, or by the earth, or by Jerusalem, or by their own heads." To these they annexed less sanctity, and were therefore less scrupulous about the violation of them. But our Lord shews, that to swear by the creature was, in fact, to swear by the Creator himself; since every creature was his, and subsisted only by his providential care. On another occasion he entered more fully still into this argument, and shewed the folly of recurring to such subterfuges^h. In fact, if a separation could be made, there would be to the full as much guilt in swearing by the creature as in swearing by the Creator; since it would be an ascribing of omniscience and omnipotence to that which is incapable of knowing the things about which the appeal is made, or of executing judgment between the parties. This is idolatry; and, as idolatry, will be visited with God's heaviest displeasureⁱ. This statement is abundantly confirmed by the Apostle James, who prohibits the same kind of oaths under the pain of eternal condemnation^k.

Once more, the prohibition extends to *all unnecessary confirmation of our word*. All vehement protestations are unbecoming the Christian character. Unless the urgency of the occasion require some additional testimony, a simple affirmation or negation is all that we should use: our "Yea should be yea, and our Nay, nay." If questioned, we may repeat our answer; "Yea, yea," or "Nay, nay;" but beyond that we ought not to go, except the authority of a magistrate, or the importance of the subject, absolutely require it.]

Having thus endeavoured to mark the extent of the prohibition, we will proceed to state,

II. The reasons of it—

Our Lord says, "Whatsoever is more than these, cometh of evil." The words which are here translated "evil," may also mean, "the evil one:" and in

^h Matt. xxiii. 16—22.

ⁱ Jer. v. 7.

^k Jam. v. 12.

this sense many understand them. If we take them in the former sense, it relates to the *source* of such expressions ; and if in the latter sense, it refers rather to their *tendency* : since Satan instigates men to swear, in order that he may accomplish by that means his own malevolent designs. Both senses being equally good and proper, we shall include both.

Our Lord then prohibits oaths, because they are evil,

1. In their source—

[Whence do they spring? Frequently *from an undue vehemence of temper*. Those who are irascible, almost always are intemperate in their expressions. They will swear, if not by God, yet by their *life*, their *soul*, their *faith* ; or they will pledge their honour, which yet is God's, as much as their "head" is God's. In short, whether they affirm or deny, they will, directly or indirectly, make God a party in their cause. If reproved for this, they will urge their passion as an excuse; but this is to urge one sin as an excuse for another : and, if we grant that hasty expressions originate in hasty tempers, they are on that very account exceeding criminal. They "come of evil," and are for that very reason to be condemned.

But they arise also *from low thoughts of the importance of truth*. A person duly sensible of the sacredness of truth will not hastily convey an idea that his simple assertions are unworthy of credit : he will be cautious what he affirms : and, having affirmed any thing, he will expect his word to be taken as much as his oath. If unreasonable persons require more, he will rather leave the confirmation of his word to other testimony, than admit, by unnecessary oaths or protestations, the existence of an intention to deceive. In direct opposition to such a character is he, who wantonly transgresses the commandment in our text : he proves by that very act, that he has no such high sense of honour, no such value for truth, no such disposition to maintain his character for veracity. What then must that habit be, which so degrades every one that yields to it ; or rather, I should say, which marks him so destitute of the noblest attributes of man ?

We may further add, that all violations of this commandment proceed *from a disregard of God, and of every thing belonging to him*. Who that had a reverence for the Divine Majesty, would dare to profane his name, and to appeal to him on every trivial occasion ? People, when they take God's name in vain, account it sufficient to say, " I did not think of it : " but what excuse is that ? It says, in fact, ' I have no reverence for God : he has forbidden such levity ; but I have no fear of offending him : he is present when I profane his

name; but I have no wish to please him. Were I in the presence of an earthly monarch, I could take heed to my words, and put a bridle on my tongue; but, though I know that God both sees and hears me, I regard him no more than if he did not exist. It is true, he declares, that, "if I take his name in vain, he will not hold me guiltless;" but "my lips are my own: who is he, that he should be Lord over me¹?" Let him *say* what he will, or *do* what he will, I am determined to have my own way, and to set him at defiance.⁷

Once more I ask, what must that habit be, which betrays such a disposition as this?

2. In their tendency—

[Satan, "the god of this world," is ever "working in all the children of disobedience." As he put it into the hearts of Ananias and Sapphira to lie, so he puts it into the hearts of ungodly men to swear. By this he has several objects to accomplish.

By this he hopes, first, *to eradicate truth and virtue from the world*. When he has prevailed on men so to cast off the fear of God as to take his name in vain, he will easily instigate them to anything else. Having already lowered their estimate of truth, he will soon lead them to overstep the bounds of truth, and occasionally to confirm their falsehoods also with oaths. Indeed he stirs up men to confirm with oaths that which is doubtful, more frequently than that which is true; and consequently to perjure themselves, without being at all aware what guilt they are contracting: and could he influence all, as he does the great mass of those who are under his dominion, there would be no longer any truth or virtue to be found. He was a liar from the beginning; and he would take care that all his children should be known by their resemblance to him^m.

By this too he hopes, in the next place, *to bring God himself into contempt*. How ardently he desires to attain this object, we need not say: but this is clear, that the means he uses to attain it are admirably adapted to the end proposed. Tell a person who is accustomed to swear, that God is displeased with him; and you make no more impression on him than if he had never heard of such a Being. Tell him that he shall be fined a few shillings, and he is all alive to the subject: but if you speak of "the judgments of God, he puffs at them" with perfect contemptⁿ. Nor is it in the speaker only that these effects are produced: the hearers of such conversation gradually lose their abhorrence of the sin, and their tender concern for the honour of their God: and the more this insensibility is diffused, the more does Satan exult and triumph.

¹ Ps. xii. 4.

^m John viii. 44.

ⁿ Ps. x. 5.

Lastly, by this Satan aims *to destroy the souls of men*. What destruction he makes in this nation by means of oaths, none but God can tell. This appears to many to be a little sin; and Satan easily seduces men to the commission of it. But, even if it drew no other sins along with it, it would not be small, nor would the consequences of it be unimportant. God has said, that “he will not hold such persons guiltless.” They may hold themselves guiltless, it is true; but God will not form his judgment according to their estimate: he has fixed his determination, and will never reverse it. This Satan knows: and if he can but deceive us with vain hopes, he has gained his end. Yes, in truth, that roaring lion goeth about, seeking to devour us; and then does he most prosper in his endeavours, when he leads us to “sport ourselves with our own deceivings^o.”]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are addicted to the habit of swearing—

[I speak not to those who are familiar with oaths and imprecations (if their own consciences do not speak to them, all that I can say will be to little purpose); but to those who make only occasional appeals to God, or take his name in vain. View your sin as it has been set forth: view it in its source. What undue warmth of temper does it manifest! what insensibility to the value and importance of truth! and what a profane disregard of God! View it in its tendency: see how it tends to eradicate virtue from the world; to bring God himself into contempt, and to ruin the souls of men. Is this a habit that you will indulge? What do you gain by it? By other sins you obtain some kind of gratification; but by this, none at all: it brings no pleasure, no profit, no honour, along with it. In the commission of other sins you sell your souls for something; in this, for nought; you do not sell, but *give*, yourselves to your great adversary. O that God may impress this thought upon your minds, and that this word may be ever sounding in your ears, “**SWEAR NOT AT ALL!**”]

2. Those who are free from that habit—

[Shall I tell you what the ungodly world are ready to say to you? “These people will not *swear*; but they will *lie*.” Dearly beloved, this would be a dreadful reproach indeed if it were true: and whosoever he be to whom this reproach attaches, that person has reason to tremble for his state before God. Tell me not of faith, or love, or any thing else; for this is certain, that “all liars shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone^p.” Christian tradesmen,

consider this in your dealings with mankind; for “as the nail sticketh between the jointings of the stones, so doth lying between buying and selling^a.” Christian servants, remember this when tempted to conceal a fault, or to exculpate yourselves from some blame. Let all, of every class, and every degree, remember this. If ye be Christ’s indeed, ye will remember him “in whose lips there was no guile found.” Let truth be in your inward parts, and let it be ever dear to your souls. Set a watch before the door of your lips; for “of every idle word you shall give account in the day of judgment;” yea, “by your words you shall be justified; and by your words you shall be condemned^b.”]

^a Ecclesiasticus xxvii. 2. ^b Matt. xii. 36, 37.

MCCCVII.

RETALIATION FORBIDDEN.

Matt. v. 38—41. *Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.*

IF Christianity be worthy of admiration on account of the sublime mysteries it reveals, it is no less so on account of the pure morality it inculcates. Its precepts are as far above the wisdom of fallen man, as its doctrines. Search all the systems of ethics that ever were written, and where shall we find such directions as these? In vain shall we look for them in the productions of Greece and Rome: in vain shall we consult the sages and philosophers of any other nation: such precepts as these are found nowhere but in the inspired volume. *The law of retaliation* has in all nations been deemed equitable and right: but in the Christian code it is expressly forbidden.

In considering the subject of retaliation, we shall notice,

I. The errors which obtain in the world respecting it—

The Pharisees admitted of revenge; and grounded that license upon the word of God. The passages which they adduced in confirmation of their sentiments were strong; but they did not at all refer to the conduct of individuals towards each other, but of magistrates towards the community at large^a. To apply them to individuals, was a perversion of them, a perversion disgraceful to the teachers of such doctrines, and fatal to those who embraced them.

We, having our Lord's own comment on those passages, cannot any longer justify our errors by an appeal to Holy Writ: but yet our sentiments in relation to the subject treated of in our text, are, for the most part, precisely similar to those which were maintained among the Jews. Two things in particular we will specify, which are universally applauded amongst us, yet are exceeding contrary to the spirit of Christianity:

1. A rigid maintenance of our rights—

[Doubtless our rights, whether civil or religious, ought to be dear to us: and a certain degree of watchfulness over them may well be admitted; because if our rights, whether public or private, be invaded by one person, they may by another; and if they be suffered to be curtailed, they may be altogether annihilated. But this will not justify that extreme jealousy which some express about their rights. There are many who will talk incessantly about the rights of man, who yet will trample without remorse on all the rights of God. They will not suffer the smallest infringement of their own liberty; whilst they themselves are the most oppressive tyrants, wherever their authority extends. These may boast of their firmness in maintaining what they think to be right: but "they know not what spirit they are of." How unlike are they to Paul, who, rather than insist upon the support to which, as a minister of Christ, he was entitled, would work at his trade by night, after having been occupied in preaching all the day! How unlike to Christ also, who, when, as the Son of God, he might have claimed exemption from paying tribute to the temple, wrought a miracle to satisfy the demand, rather than put a stumbling-block in the way of any by a refusal! We do not undertake to say, that, in cases of great importance, a person may not expostu-

^a Exod. xxi. 22—25. Deut. xix. 16—21. These passages were to direct them in the administration of justice.

late with his oppressor, as Christ did^b; or insist upon his right, as did the Apostle Paul^c; but we are perfectly sure that a readiness to demand our utmost right on every occasion, argues a spirit very different from that which is inculcated in the Gospel of Christ.]

2. A keen resentment of wrongs—

[This is thought highly meritorious. A disposition to pass by an insult or an injury would be deemed meanness and cowardice; and the person who indulged it would be banished from society, and held up to universal scorn and contempt. Hence arise wars, duels, and domestic feuds without number. But is such a disposition agreeable to the word of God? Look at the conduct of David, when persecuted by Saul: *he* repeatedly had his adversary within his power, and could easily have killed him; but he would not: he preferred rather the committing of his cause to God; and rendered nothing but good, in return for all the evil that Saul had done unto him: and, to shew that he did not consider such conduct as a superfluous act of generosity, he brands the opposite conduct with the name of *wickedness*: “Thus saith the proverb of the ancients; *Wickedness* proceedeth from the wicked; but *mine* hand shall *not* be upon thee^d.” Compare with this the conduct also of the saints in the New Testament: St. James, speaking of them to their proud oppressors, says, “Ye have condemned and killed the just; and *he doth not resist you*^e.”]

That the sentiments of the world on the subject of retaliation are quite erroneous, will appear yet further, by considering,

II. The line of conduct which Christianity requires—

The authoritative command of Jesus in the text, is this: “I say unto you, That ye resist not evil,” that is, that ye resist not *the injurious person*^f. This, especially taken in connexion with our Lord’s illustration of it, undoubtedly enjoins us to live in the exercise of,

1. A patient spirit—

[We are not to be inflamed with anger against those who treat us ill: but to bear their injuries with meekness and long-suffering. The direction of the Apostle is, “In your patience possess ye your souls:” and again, “Let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking

^b John xviii. 22, 23.

^c Acts xvi. 37.

^d 1 Sam. xxiv. 10, 13. See also xxvi. 7—12.

^e Jam. v. 6.

^f τῷ πονηρῷ.

nothing." I am aware, that it is difficult to bear injuries, when we know them to be altogether unmerited. But to abstain from every thing vindictive was enjoined under the Old Testament^g: and much more is it insisted on in the New Testament^h. And the more undeserving we are of the injurious treatment, the more are we called upon to display our patience, after the example of our blessed Lord, who instead of rendering evil for evil, silently committed his cause to his righteous God and Fatherⁱ.]

2. A yielding spirit—

Suppose a person were to carry the insult so far as to strike us a blow upon the face: what ought we to do then? Are we not at liberty to return the blow? No: we may expostulate with the injurious person as our Lord did; "If I have done evil, bear witness of the evil; but, if not, why smitest thou me?" but we must not for a moment think of avenging ourselves^k. It may be said, this would be an encouragement to him to strike us again: we hope not; but if it were, it were better to "turn the other cheek," and be smitten again, than that we should resent the injury; for the blows only hurt our body; but the resentment would wound our soul.

Again, suppose any one were to injure us in our *property*, as well as our *person*, and, under colour of law, were to "take away our coat:" what shall we do? Shall we indulge a litigious spirit, in order to get it back again? No; rather let him "take our cloak also," than induce us to gratify an angry or vindictive spirit^l.

Once more;—Suppose any one, under pretence of some public emergency, were to infringe upon our *liberty*, and to compel us (as the Jews did Simon the Cyrenian, when they "compelled him to bear" our Saviour's cross,) to carry a burthen for them "a mile:" what *then*? Must we submit? Whether in *all* cases, or not, I do not pretend to say: but this is clear; that it is better to "go with him *two*" miles, than to vex ourselves, and quarrel about it. The man that yields, is always safe; he knows the extent of the injury which he receives: but he who once begins to contend, knows not where he shall stop, nor what injury he may suffer in his own soul, before the contention shall cease.]

3. A forgiving spirit—

[Forbearance and forgiveness are frequently united in the Holy Scriptures; nor should they ever be separated in our

^g Lev. xix. 18. Prov. xx. 22. and xxiv. 29.

^h Rom. xii. 17, 19. 1 Thess. v. 15.

^k Isai. l. 6. with Lam. iii. 30.

ⁱ 1 Pet. ii. 20—23.

^l 1 Cor. vi. 7.

conduct^m. Nor would the exercise of forgiveness be so difficult, if only we considered how much greater injury people do to themselves, than they can possibly do to us. Do what they will, they can never injure us, except in mere external things: our souls are beyond their reach: but, whilst they endeavour to injure *us*, they do the most irreparable injury to their own souls. Let us suppose for a moment, that a person, robbing us of a little worthless fruit, were to fall down, and break every bone of his body; would not our pity for his misfortune swallow up all resentment for his fault? So then it should be with us towards all who injure us: there is no comparison at all between the injury they do to us and to themselves; and therefore we should be ready to exercise forgiveness towards them, and to implore forgiveness for them at God's hands.]

LEARN then, from this subject,

1. How rare a thing real Christianity is—

[*This* is Christianity: all, without this, is an empty sound. Look then through the world, and see how little there is of it any where to be found: yea, let the saints themselves see how little of true Christianity they possess. This view of Christian duty may well fill every one of us with shame and confusion of face.]

2. How necessary a renewed spirit is, either to a right discernment of religion, or to the practice of it—

[The *precepts* of religion are no less foolishness to the natural man, than the *doctrines*. What heathen ever inculcated such lessons? or what unconverted Christian ever thoroughly approved them in his heart. People fancy that they have power to *do* the will of God: but can they do *these* things? As well may they attempt to turn the course of the sun, as so to turn the current of corrupt nature. We must have an understanding given us that we may know these thingsⁿ; and strength, that we may do them^o.]

3. How ornamental true religion is to every one that possesses it—

[Who can see a person acting up to the spirit of these precepts, and not admire him? Who can help admiring this spirit in Christ and in his holy Apostles? Surely, such are "*beautified* with salvation," and God himself must admire them^p.]

4. How happy the world would be, if vital Christianity universally prevailed—

^m Col. iii. 12, 13. Eph. iv. 31, 32.

^o 2 Cor. iii. 5.

ⁿ 1 Cor. ii. 12.

^p 1 Pet. iii. 4.

[There would then be no scope for the exercise of these difficult graces, since no injuries would be committed upon earth — — — O that God would hasten that blessed time!]

MCCCVIII.

LIBERALITY ENJOINED.

Matt. v. 42. *Give to him that asketh thee; and from him that would borrow of thee, turn not thou away.*

TO render good for evil is a duty of indispensable obligation; and many commentators consider it as particularly enjoined in the words which we have just read. If we take the passage as connected with the directions which immediately precede it, its meaning will be, that we must not be contented with a patient submission to injuries, but must actively exert ourselves to render to our enemies any service which they may require. But, as this is plainly enjoined in the verses following our text, we rather understand the text as expressing in general terms the duty of liberality, without confining it to any particular description of persons: and in that light we propose now to insist upon it.

We shall inquire,

I. What is that spirit which is inculcated?—

Were we to adhere strictly to the *literal* meaning of the words, they would apply only to those whose circumstances in life empowered them to *give* and *lend* to their more necessitous brethren. Moreover, they might, *as to the letter*, be obeyed by a person of opulence, whilst he was far from yielding to God any acceptable obedience. We must therefore inquire, what that *spirit* is which they inculcate? They enjoin,

1. A spirit of compassion—

[It is to be supposed that those who make applications to us for a gift or loan, are themselves in necessitous and distressed circumstances. And towards all such persons we should exercise unfeigned pity and compassion. We should consider them, not merely as children of the same heavenly parent, but as members of our own body; and should have the same sympathy

with them and desire to relieve them, as any one member of our body would feel towards any other that had sustained an injury. We should "look, not on our own things only, but every one also on the things of others;" "bearing their burthens," and being as ready to participate their sorrows as their joys. The language of our hearts should ever be in unison with that of Job, "Did not I weep for him that was in trouble? was not my soul grieved for the poor^a?" This is a spirit which all must have, whatever be their situation and circumstances in life: and if we can "behold our brother in need, and shut up our bowels of compassion from him," it may well be asked, "How dwelleth the love of God in us^b?"]

2. A spirit of benevolence—

[This is a disposition of a higher kind. There is a natural tenderness in many, and a susceptibility of impression from tales of woe, at the same time that they are not active in searching out opportunities of exercising their benevolent affections. But our feelings towards mankind should resemble those of a tender mother, who needs not to have her sensibilities called forth by any distressing accident: she loves her child, and delights in administering to its wants: her regards are spontaneously exercised towards it; and, if she see any occasion for more than ordinary attention, she finds her own happiness in contributing to the happiness of her child. Thus, if we saw one to whom a gift or loan was necessary, we should be ready, at the very first intimation of the case, to stretch forth towards him the hand of charity, conceiving ourselves more blessed in an opportunity of imparting good, than he can be in receiving it at our hands. In a word, we should tread in the steps of our adorable Lord, who "went about doing good;" and, like the sun in its course, should exist only for the benefit of others, and diffuse happiness wheresoever we come.]

3. A spirit of generosity—

[Particular occasions must be met with a zeal proportioned to them. It may be, that some urgent necessity has arisen, and that a great effort is requisite to sustain an afflicted brother. Or, it may be a season of general distress, when the multitude of those who need our assistance calls for more than ordinary exertions to relieve them. We have an instance of this in the primitive Church. The Jews were so inveterate against their brethren who embraced Christianity, that they would, if possible, have deprived them of all means of subsistence: but the richer converts, who had lands or houses, sold them, and put all their money into one common stock; thus

^a Job xxx. 25.

^b 1 John iii. 17.

reducing themselves to a level with the lowest, that all might be supplied with “food convenient for them^c.”

Another instance we have, in the churches of Macedonia, who, “in a trial of great affliction, and in the midst of deep poverty, abounded unto the riches of liberality;” exerting themselves, “not only according to their ability, but beyond it,” to supply their distressed brethren in Judæa^d.

Thus should it be with us, when any great and extraordinary difficulty has arisen: our spirit should rise to the occasion: and, if we cannot emulate that glorious example, we should at least be ready to comply with the exhortation of the Baptist, “He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise^e.”]

Doubtless this disposition is amiable: but how shall we determine,

II. To what extent it should be exercised?—

With respect to *the disposition itself* we do not hesitate to say, that it admits of no limit whatever—

[There is *not a person* in the universe who is not called to exercise it. The mechanic, or the labourer, should exert himself, according to his ability, to relieve others; he should “labour, working with his hands, not to support himself merely, but that he may have to give to him that needeth^f.” Even the widow that has but two mites, may yet exceed in her liberality all her opulent neighbours^g. The very person that receives relief, may yet pant for an opportunity to afford it to others: and, in that case, God, who sees his heart, will accept the will for the deed: “for, if there be first a willing mind, it shall be accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not^h.” Nor is there any assignable limit to *the degree* in which the disposition should be exercised. The only limit that can be mentioned (if it may be called a *limit*), is, to be “merciful, even as our Father which is in heaven is mercifulⁱ.”]

But the precise *manner* in which it should be exercised must be regulated by circumstances. It must vary according to,

1. Our own means and abilities—

^c Acts iv. 32—35. ^d 2 Cor. viii. 1—4.

^e Luke iii. 11. If the occasion of the sermon be *very pressing*, it might be here stated to advantage.

^f Eph. iv. 28. ^g Mark xii. 41—44. ^h 2 Cor. viii. 12.

ⁱ Luke vi. 36.

[All persons have it not in their power to do good to the same extent : nor can all who have the same income, devote the same proportion of it to the poor : for a man who has a family, cannot possibly have so much to spare, as he who has none but himself to maintain : nor can it be reasonably expected, that one, who, from his rank in society, has a certain degree of dignity to support, can afford as much as another, who, with the same income, has no such necessity imposed upon him. Besides, persons may be very differently circumstanced. One may be able to afford a *loan*, when he is not able, with propriety, to *give* : and another may be able to *give* a smaller sum, when he cannot *lend* a larger. Persons therefore must judge for themselves in such particulars as these ; and regulate their conduct according to their circumstances.]

2. The necessities of those who apply to us.

[To offer to a person who has been suddenly brought from affluent circumstances to poverty, such a pittance as we might give to a beggar, would be to mock and insult him : and, on the other hand, to bestow on a common beggar, what would be suited to the other case, would be most unpardonable profusion. Besides, we must judge whether there exist any necessity at all : for, if we will give to all who are willing to ask, and lend to all who are willing to borrow, we shall soon exhaust our own resources, however great they may be : and, by giving or lending where there is no necessity, we shall incapacitate ourselves for assisting those who are in real distress. Here then, doubtless, is scope for the exercise of discretion : and true liberality, instead of prohibiting such discretion, demands it at our hands.]

3. The prospect there is of our aid being effectual for the relief of him who asks it—

[Here is an *idle* man, who will do nothing for his own maintenance ; a *prodigal* man, who never thinks of the use of money ; a *drunken* and *profligate* man, who wastes all his substance in riotous living : to what purpose shall you exert yourself in any great degree for such persons ? Give them all that you have, and they will soon be poor again. The best way to relieve such persons, is to provide labour for them, and to make a reformation of their conduct necessary for their own subsistence. Sometimes a seasonable loan may enable a person to provide for his family, when, without such aid, he could not attain the situation which is open for him. *There*, to strain a point for him, is both liberal and wise : but where the case is such as occurs daily all around us, we must so give, as that we may have a reserve to *lend* ; and so *lend*, as that we may have a reserve to *give*. There are some cases, however,

where we may well be absolved from either giving or lending, unless indeed just to supply the necessities of the moment; I mean, where a person's circumstances are so involved, that all we can do for him would be only as a drop in the ocean. *There*, if by public contributions we can aid him, well: but, if not, to impoverish ourselves without benefiting him, would be, not piety, but folly.]

It will not be unprofitable to subjoin a few HINTS for the use of,

1. Those who *want* relief—

[Many will ask a gift or loan without any real necessity. But such persons should reflect, that whilst they trespass thus on the liberality of the rich, they are themselves oppressors of the poor. It is in no person's power to give to *every one* that asketh, or to lend to *every one* that would borrow (for though St. Luke so expresses it, the direction must be limited in the nature of things^k); and consequently, they who by unnecessary applications exhaust the funds of a liberal man, deprive him of the power of doing good to others who need it more. None therefore should take undue advantage of the piety of others, or seek from others what by increased activity they might furnish from their own resources.

Another point of great importance is, that they who borrow, should adhere strictly to their word, as to the season of repaying the loan. It is incredible, how much they who violate their engagements in this respect, discourage, and (I had almost said) harden the hearts of those who delight in doing good. I know it is said, "Do good and lend, hoping for *nothing* again^l:" and, if we be told, that the prospect of repayment is distant and uncertain, the duty is comparatively easy: but, when we are told that at such a season the loan shall be repaid, and find that the borrower thinks no more of his promises, or (as is frequently the case) asks a little forbearance in the first instance, and then, on finding it *kindly* exercised, construes that kindness into a forgiveness of the debt, *that* conduct has a sad tendency to wound the feelings of the liberal, and to make them averse from lending. *In this view*, therefore, the injury which such wicked people do, is exceeding great. I call them "wicked;" for so the Psalmist designates them; "The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again^m." Nor is it their benefactors only whom they injure, but society at large; inasmuch as they prevent the exercise of benevolence towards many people far worthier than themselves. To all therefore who have contracted such obligations, I would recommend tenfold diligence

^k Luke vi. 30.

^l Luke vi. 35.

^m Ps. xxxvii. 21.

and self-denial; till they have executed their engagements, and fulfilled their word.]

2. To those who *impart* it—

[It sometimes happens, that even in the generous mind a niggardly thought will arise, and a backwardness to exercise the benevolence that is called for. Against such thoughts God has very strongly cautioned usⁿ: and we shall do well to be on our guard against them. We should be careful “not to be weary in well-doing.” We should remember, that God himself is pledged for the repayment of all that we either give or lend, *provided we act from a principle of faith and love*^o. The best means of preventing such an evil thought is certainly to get the soul impressed with a sense of Christ’s love in dying for us^p — — But, next to that, it will be well to reflect, that we are only *stewards* of what we possess; and that, though no *individual* has an absolute claim upon us, the poor at large have: a portion of our property is their “due,” and we ought to pay it *without delay*^q. Let then every one lay by a portion of his income for benevolent uses^r, and bear in mind, that both his present and future happiness will be augmented in proportion to his liberality^s.]

ⁿ Deut. xv. 7—11.

^o Prov. xix. 17.

^p 2 Cor. viii. 9.

^q Prov. iii. 27, 28.

^r 1 Cor. xvi. 2.

^s 2 Cor. ix. 6, 7.

MCCCIX.

LOVE TO ENEMIES ENJOINED.

Matt. v. 43—48. *Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the Publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the Publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*

IT is well said by the Psalmist, that “the commandment of God is exceeding broad;” since it reaches to every disposition of the mind, and requires infinitely more than man, in his present weak and

degenerate state, can perform. Indeed, though many traces of the law still remain upon the heart, and are discoverable by the light of reason, there are depths in it which unaided reason could never have fathomed, and a breadth and length which it could never have explored. Amongst the precepts which we consider as known only through the medium of Revelation, we would particularly specify that which is contained in the text. Human nature would itself approve of love to *friends*; but our Lord commands us to love our enemies.

In discoursing on the text, we shall be led to consider,

I. The duty inculcated—

The Jewish teachers in general sanctioned the indulgence of *hatred* towards enemies—

[We must, in justice to them, acknowledge that they had some shadow of reason for their opinions: for God had commanded the Jews entirely to extirpate the Canaanites: and, though some little favour was to be shewn to the Edomites and Egyptians^a, the Ammonites and Moabites and Midianites were never to be treated with kindness^b; and “the very remembrance of the Amalekites was to be blotted out from under heaven^c.” Moreover, the duty of love seemed to be restricted to those of their own nation^d: and in case even a Jew should accidentally kill any person, the man who was the nearest relative of the deceased was at liberty to kill the man-slayer, in case he could overtake him before he could enter into a city of refuge, or should be able afterwards to find him without the gates of that city^e.

But these mistaken teachers did not consider that a commandment given in relation to those *devoted nations* was not intended to be made a rule of conduct between *individuals*: nor did they recollect, that, whilst they restricted the word “neighbour” to those of their own nation, the Decalogue itself had taught them to comprehend the whole universe under that name^f: (for a Jew was no more at liberty to “covet the wife” of a Heathen, than he was of a Jew.) Nor, lastly, did they reflect, that the ordinance relative to the man-slayer was altogether typical of Christ and of his salvation^g.]

^a Deut. xxiii. 7. ^b Deut. xxiii. 3, 6. and Numb. xxv. 16—18.

^c Deut. xxv. 17—19.

^d Lev. xix. 17, 18.

^e Numb. xxxv. 26, 27.

^f Exod. xx. 17.

^g Heb. vi. 18.

In opposition to such erroneous notions, our Lord enjoined, in the most authoritative manner, the *love* of enemies—

[He takes for granted, that his faithful disciples would be “hated, reviled, and persecuted:” and under all the evil treatment which they may receive, he commands them to return *kind words* for *bitter*, *benevolent actions* for *spiteful*, and *fervent prayers* for the most *cruel oppressions*. Not that this was any *new* precept: it was enjoined under the law as strongly as under the Gospel^h; and was exemplified too under the legal dispensation, in almost as eminent a degree as even by the Apostles themselvesⁱ. There is this difference, indeed, that the exercise of such heavenly tempers was less frequent among the Jews, because few of them comparatively attained to any high degrees of piety: whereas, now that “the Spirit is poured out more abundantly” upon the Church, this is a *common* attainment, or rather, I should say, an *universal* attainment, amongst all who are truly converted unto God. Our blessed Lord set us the example, “going as a lamb to the slaughter, and, as a sheep before her shearers, not opening his mouth,” either in threatenings or complaints^k. Even in the agonies of crucifixion he prayed for his murderers^l, as Stephen also did in his dying moments^m, and thousands of others also have done amidst the flames of martyrdom. This is our duty, even in such extreme cases as are here supposed; and consequently must be so in all cases of inferior moment.]

However difficult this duty may appear, we shall address ourselves cheerfully to the performance of it, if only we consider,

II. The reasons for performing it—

The Lord’s people are represented by the Apostle as “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that they should shew forth the praises (or *virtues*) of him that hath called themⁿ.” But how are they to answer this great end of their calling? It is very principally by attending to this duty. By their performance of it they are to mark,

1. Their resemblance to God—

[The whole race of mankind, with comparatively few exceptions, is up in arms against God. A very great proportion

^h Compare Rom. xii. 20, 21. with Prov. xxv. 21, 22.

ⁱ 2 Chron. xxviii. 15. Ps. xxxv. 12—14.

^k Isai. liii. 7. with 1 Pet. ii. 21—23.

^l Luke xxiii. 34.

^m Acts vii. 60.

ⁿ 1 Pet. ii. 9.

of them are bowing down to stocks and stones: and almost all, even of those who acknowledge the one true God, are yet denying him daily, and shewing their enmity to him by wicked works. But how does he requite them? Does he avail himself of his power to deprive them of every comfort, and to punish them all according to their deserts? No: with much long-suffering he endures all their provocations, notwithstanding they are "vessels of wrath already fitted for destruction:" he even loads them indiscriminately with all the bounties of his providence, "making his sun to rise equally on the evil and on the good, and sending rain equally on the just and on the unjust." In like manner must we act towards those who injure us. We must bear with them, and do them good according to our ability: and *it is by such conduct only that we can approve ourselves his children.* Let us not, however, be misunderstood: it is not necessary that we should deal with such persons altogether as our *friends*: for even God himself does not do *that*: he comes to his own people in a more intimate manner, and "supps with them," and "makes his abode with them," and "manifests himself unto *them* as he does not unto the world." Thus also may we do. There is a love of benevolence, a love of beneficence, and a love of complacency, if we may so speak: the two former must be exercised towards all: the last may fitly be reserved for those who alone possess the dispositions worthy of it. Such a preference God himself authorizes, when he says, "Do good unto all men, but especially unto them who are of the household of faith^o."]

2. Their superiority to an ungodly world—

[God will not be satisfied with seeing his people live after the manner of the ungodly. To what purpose have they been "redeemed," if they are to retain the same "vain conversation" which those around them follow? To what purpose have "their eyes been opened to behold the wondrous things of God's law," to what purpose have they been adopted into his family, and been filled with his Spirit, and been made heirs of his inheritance, if they are not to walk worthy of their high calling? Are their superior knowledge, obligations, prospects, and assistances, to have no *practical* influence upon their lives? The vilest of publicans and sinners will love and benefit their *friends*; and is this a standard for God's redeemed people? No: they must love their *enemies*: else, "*What do they more than others?*" Surely, if we are no better than others in our dispositions and conduct, we shall be no better than they in our eternal destiny.]

That we may have a more complete view of this duty, let us inquire into,

III. The extent to which it is to be performed—

The law of God is at once the *rule* and *measure* of our duty—

[The law is a perfect transcript of the mind and will of God. It was originally written upon the heart of man: and man's perfect conformity to it constituted that image of God in which he was created. To have these dispositions restored, and thereby to regain that image, is the object which we are taught to aspire after with incessant ardour. God has promised to his people that they shall be "renewed after his image in righteousness and true holiness:" and of that promise we must seek the full accomplishment. To dream of a conformity to God's *natural* perfections, were folly and madness: we cannot possibly be omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent: but his *moral* perfections we *may* and *must* attain: nor ought we to be satisfied with any precise measure of them; we should never think we have attained any thing whilst any thing remains to be attained.]

To a perfect conformity to that law we must be ever pressing forward—

[This was St. Paul's mind. After he had preached the Gospel for twenty years, and had attained an eminence of piety which probably none but the Lord Jesus Christ himself ever surpassed, he said, "Not as though I had already attained, or were already perfect, but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of God in Christ Jesus^p." Nor is this a pursuit proper for Apostles only; it is equally necessary for all. "Now are we the sons of God," says St. John: "and *every one* that hath this hope in him purifieth himself *even as he is pure^q*." In a word, the model for our imitation is God: nor must we ever stop, till we are "holy as God is holy," and "perfect even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect."]

We cannot contemplate this subject without NOTICING,

1. What need we have of mercy at the hands of God—

[Let us look back through our whole lives, and see how numberless have been our transgressions against this holy law; and let us look into our own hearts, and see what a proneness

^p Phil. iii. 12.

^q 1 John iii. 2, 3.

there is in us yet daily and hourly to transgress it. Who does not find, that, when injured and insulted, his heart is ready to rise against his adversary in a way of retaliation and invective? Who does not feel, that, without the divine assistance, he can no more maintain the exalted spirit here spoken of, than he can create a world? — — — Let us then humble ourselves before God in dust and ashes. Let us acknowledge our desert of his heavy displeasure, and our need of pardon through the blood of Christ. Let us at the same time implore the assistance of his Holy Spirit, that we may be enabled to “walk as Christ walked,” and to exercise that kindness towards others which we desire and hope for when standing before his tribunal — — —]

2. What encouragement we have to expect mercy at his hands—

[Has God required *us* to love our enemies, even whilst they are manifesting towards us their enmity to the utmost of their power; and will not *he himself* shew mercy to us, when we lay down the weapons of our rebellion? Again; has he required of us such tempers as fruits of our conversion; and will he refuse us that grace which is necessary to produce them? Assuredly not. If he gives the bounties of his *providence* to his most inveterate *enemies*, he will surely give the blessings of his *grace* to his suppliant and repenting *friends*? Let not then a sense of past guilt appal us, or a sense of present weakness discourage us: but let us “go boldly to the throne of Grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help us in the time of need.”]

MCCCX.

CHRISTIANS DO MORE THAN OTHERS.

Matt. v. 47. *What do ye more than others?*

OUR Lord is here rescuing the law from the false glosses with which the Scribes and Pharisees had obscured it. It is quite a mistake to imagine that he extended the law beyond its original meaning. The law was perfect, being a perfect transcript of God's mind and will. Had it required less than it now does, it would have been unworthy of God: in fact, unless its demands are now extended beyond what they ought to be (which we know is not the case,) it must have given men a license to love God and our neighbour less than we really ought: or, in other words,

it would have given a license to sin. The particular command to which our Lord refers in the context was, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." This the Scribes and Pharisees interpreted as giving a liberty, if not an absolute command, to hate our enemies. But our Lord shews, that every man, whether friend or enemy, is comprehended in the term "neighbour," and that every man therefore has a claim upon us to be loved by us as ourselves. If we extend our regards to friends only, "What," says our Lord, "do ye more than others?" This is a very pointed question, importing that the Lord's people ought to do more than others, and may reasonably be expected so to do. In confirmation of this truth, I will,

I. Shew why the Lord's people may reasonably be expected to do more than others—

The question is founded in reason and justice : for, if we be the Lord's people in truth,

1. We are more indebted to him than others—

[All are indebted to him for the gift of a Saviour, and for the offer of eternal life through him. (Of temporal blessings such as the whole world partake of, I forbear to speak.) But true Christians are indebted not merely for a gift of the Saviour to them, but for *having from eternity been given to the Saviour* as his peculiar people, whom he should redeem from death, and enjoy for ever as "his purchased possession." It is surprising how often our blessed Lord speaks of them under this character in his last intercessory prayer^a — — — And it is always mentioned as a distinguishing mercy, that raises them far above the rest of the world, and entails the greatest obligations upon them. Moreover, *the faith by which they are brought into this union with Christ* is also the gift of God. "To them it is given in the behalf of Christ to believe in him^b." And this is no less a distinguishing mercy than the other: for the whole world, with the exception of this little remnant, are in unbelief. *The peace too that flows from this union*, O what an inestimable gift is that! "To the wicked there is no peace:" but these have "a peace which passeth all understanding," and "a joy that is unspeakable and glorified."

Say, whether this be not a very abundant reason for our

^a John xvii. 2, 6, 9—12, 24.

^b Phil. i. 29.

shewing to God more gratitude than others, and labouring to serve him with every faculty both of body and soul?]

2. We have greater assistances from him than others—

[Every man has, more or less, what may be called the common influences of the Spirit. For there is no man who has not occasionally felt some compunction for his sins, and some desire of amendment. But whence do “these good thoughts and holy desires proceed, but from God?” They would no more arise in the heart of fallen man than of the fallen angels, if they were not suggested by the Spirit of God^c. But believers have what may be called the special grace of God; by which I understand, not a different *kind* of grace, but a different degree, even such a degree as shall prevail over all the resistance which it meets with in the soul^d. Nor is it only in order to their first conversion to God that they are so wrought upon, but through the whole of their lives are they preserved and strengthened by the same Spirit, in order to their final salvation^e. To what a degree this strength is communicated to them, may be seen in various passages of Holy Writ: it is equal to that which God exerted in raising up Jesus Christ from the dead, and setting him at his own right hand, above all the principalities and powers of earth and hell^f. It is such as to display the powers of Omnipotence itself^g, and to approve itself the workmanship of Him who created the universe out of nothing^h.

All this is unknown to others, who, having never earnestly implored this aid, are left under the power of Satan, and are “carried captive by the devil at his will.” And is not this a call upon them for exertion? And does it not afford a just ground of expectation, that they shall do more than others who have no such assistance?]

3. We make a greater profession of zeal for God than others—

[The generality not only make no particular profession of love to God, but account this very want of profession a sufficient reason for all the carelessness and indifference which they manifest. But the believer does not thus glory in his shame. He knows his obligations to God; nor is he ashamed to confess them. He knows that he has been redeemed by the blood of God's only dear Son; and that, “having been bought with a price, he is bound to glorify God with his body and his spirit,

^c 2 Cor. iii. 5. and v. 5.

^d Ps. cx. 3. Phil. ii. 13.

^e 1 Thess. v. 23.

^f Eph. i. 19—21.

^g Eph. iii. 16. and Col. i. 11.

^h Eph. ii. 10. 2 Cor. v. 17.

which are God'sⁱ." He considers himself as called to die unto the world," yea, to be "crucified unto it, and to have it crucified unto him, by the cross of Christ^k." He acknowledges that "his affections are to be set, not upon things below, but on things above^l:" and that he has nothing to do in this world but to prepare for a better. Hence, if occasion require, he speaks of himself as running in a race, wrestling for the mastery, and engaged in a warfare. These things he professes, not from vain ostentation, but from necessity; or rather, he does not so much *profess* them as *do* them: and the profession is rather the result of his efforts, than any declaration independent of them. As far as mere profession is concerned, he would rather be silent than talkative: but his life speaks; and he is content that it should speak, if only it may afford a light which may be instructive and animating to those around him.

But this profession, whether voluntary or not, calls for consistency in his conduct, and makes it indispensable for him, whilst calling himself "a child of light and of the day," not to walk as those who are "children of darkness and of the night^m."

4. God's honour is more involved in our conduct than in that of others—

[Others may do what they will, and no one thinks of reflecting on religion on their account. Nay, even the grossest immoralities may be committed by them, without exciting any surprise, or attracting any notice. But let a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ do any thing amiss, and the whole world hears of it: nor is he alone blamed, who commits the evil condemned, but all who are connected with him in the same religious society are blamed also; yea, and all religious persons generally, as being all alike. Even the Gospel itself too is condemned as sanctioning such conduct, and as having a natural tendency to produce it. The general feeling on such an occasion is that of exultation and triumph: "There, there, so would we have itⁿ." Had Saul committed the evils which David did, though the act might have been blamed, God's honour would not have suffered. But when David sinned, "the name of God was everywhere blasphemed on his account^o."

What an obligation then does this lay on Christians to "walk holily, justly, and unblameably" before men, that "the way of truth may not be evil spoken of through them^p!" If there is a "woe unto the world because of the offences" which are committed in the Church, and which harden multitudes in

ⁱ 1 Cor. vi. 20.

^k Gal. vi. 14.

^l Col. iii. 1.

^m 1 Thess. v. 5.

ⁿ Ps. xxxv. 25.

^o 2 Sam. xii. 14.

^p 2 Pet. ii. 2.

their infidelity, much more does woe attach to that man who commits the offences, and casts a stumbling-block in the way of others, to the destruction of their souls as well as of his own^q. In proportion therefore as any deviation from the path of duty in us may prove injurious to God's honour and the interests of his Gospel, we are bound to "walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise^r;" that all who behold our light may be led rather to approve of our principles, and to glorify our God^s.]

If our obligation to approve ourselves "more excellent than our neighbours" has been established^t, let us,

II. Inquire what we do more than others—

What do we more,

1. For our own souls?

[The world, alas! evince but little concern for their own souls. A formal round of duties is all that they judge necessary: and if they are observant of the outward decencies of religion, such as frequenting the House of God, attending upon the Lord's table, maintaining family prayer, and repeating some form of devotion twice a day in their closets, they think they have done all that is required of them, and are ready to say, "What lack I more^u?" But all this may be only "a form of godliness, without the power^x," and a service wholly unacceptable to the heart-searching God^y.

"What then do ye more than this?" Are all of you doing even as much? Are not even these *forms* neglected by too many? But supposing you to be observant of these, what do ye more? Alas! the generality would be utterly at a loss to answer this question. But the true Christian shall answer it, even though he be only at present as "a babe in Christ." Do you ask me, What I do more? (he may say,) I search out my sins yet daily, in order to humble myself before God on account of them. I mourn over all that I have seen amiss in my whole conduct through life. I sigh, I groan, I weep, I smite upon my breast from day to day, crying, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" I flee to the Lord Jesus Christ for refuge: I renounce utterly all other ground of hope: I trust altogether in his atoning sacrifice, as expiating my guilt, and reconciling me to my offended God. I set my face towards Zion: and, though I travel not so expeditiously as I could wish, I make it my daily labour to advance; and I make no account of any difficulties, if only I may get forward in my heavenly way. The

^q Matt. xviii. 7.

^t Prov. xii. 26.

^y Matt. xv. 7—9.

^r Eph. v. 15.

^u Matt. xix. 20.

^s Matt. v. 16.

^x 2 Tim. iii. 5.

one concern of my life from day to day is, how shall I save my soul? "What shall it profit me if I gain the whole world, and lose my own soul?"

Now, my dear brethren, is this your state? are you thus concerned about your souls? and does your conscience bear witness, that, whilst others are occupied chiefly about the things of time and sense, "you account the whole world but as dross and dung, that you may win Christ, and be found in him, not having your own righteousness, but his?" Is this, I say, your state? Is it the state of *all* amongst you? of *all*? O would to God it were! But, if the truth were known, and it is most assuredly known to God, there are but few who can truly declare this to be the daily habit of their minds: yet must it be *your* habit, if ever you would be Christians indeed, and behold the face of God in peace.]

2. For the honour of our God?

[Little is this thought of, by the world at large. But the true Christians are not unconcerned about it. They know that God may be honoured by them: and it is their most anxious desire to bring glory to their God. There is not a perfection of the Deity which they do not endeavour to honour and exalt: his omniscience, by walking as in his immediate presence: his omnipotence, by committing altogether to him their every concern: his love, his mercy, his truth, his faithfulness, by embracing his gracious offers in the Gospel, and relying on his promises as a sure ground of their hope. They walk with him, as Enoch did: they maintain "fellowship with him and with his Son Jesus Christ" all the day long^a: accounting it their chief joy to have a sense of his presence, and the light of his countenance lifted up upon them. In their actions, they consider not what will advance their own honour or interests, but what will promote his glory: and, having ascertained that, they go forward in the prosecution of it, without any regard to consequences: a fiery furnace, or a den of lions, has no terrors for them: they fear nothing but sin: and account it an honour and a privilege to lay down life itself in His service, and for His glory^b.

And now let me ask, is it thus with *all* of you? Are *all* of you thus studious to exalt, to honour, and to glorify your God? Have earthly things no value in your eyes, in comparison of God's favour, and of his love shed abroad in your hearts? Yet without this you cannot be Christians indeed. Our blessed Lord has said, that "whoso loveth his life shall lose it; and that he only who is willing to lose it for his sake, shall find it unto life eternal^c."

^a Phil. iii. 7—9.

^b Phil. ii. 17, 18.

^a 1 John i. 3.

^c Matt. x. 39.

3. For the benefit of mankind?

[To this there is a special respect in my text. The Pharisees maintained, that we were at liberty to hate our enemies: but our Lord said, "If you love your friends only, what do ye more than others?" The loving of enemies is an attainment far above the reach of the world at large. If they abstain from revenge, it is quite as much as they ever aim at. And as for endeavouring to "win the souls" of their enemies, the thought never so much as enters into their minds. But the true Christian has a far higher standard of duty in reference to these things. He feels, indeed, that it is no easy thing to "love his enemies, to bless them that curse him, to do good to them that hate him, and to pray for them that spitefully use him and persecute him^d;" but he labours to do it, and implores grace from God that he may be able to do it; and determines, through grace, "not to be overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good." Nor is he forgetful of his obligation to seek the eternal welfare of mankind. Hence he labours for the diffusion of the sacred oracles throughout the world: he finds delight in aiding every effort that is made for the salvation both of Jews and Gentiles: and in his more immediate neighbourhood he strives to promote, as far as in him lies, the spiritual and eternal interests of all around him. In his relative duties also especially he endeavours to shew the influence of true religion: as a parent or child, as a husband or wife, as a master or servant, as a ruler or subject, he makes a point of fulfilling his duties, so that the most watchful enemy shall have no reason to speak reproachfully.

Once more then let me ask, is it thus with you? Is there amongst all of you such government of your own tempers, and such a victory over all your evil passions, as that you adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, and exhibit in the whole of your deportment his blessed image? As followers of Christ, all this is required of you: you are called, "as the elect of God, holy and beloved, to put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; and to be forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if you have a quarrel against any man, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you^e:" and if you will approve yourselves to be Christ's, "your righteousness must exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees." You must take even God himself for your pattern, and seek to be "perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect^f."

SEE then,

1. How vain is that plea, that you are as good as others!

^d ver. 44.

^e Col. iii. 12, 13.

^f ver. 20 and 48.

[Before that plea can be of any avail, you must inquire whether others are as holy as they ought to be: for if they be not, your equality with them can be no ground of satisfaction in the prospect of the future judgment. What consolation will it be to those who shall experience the wrath of God in hell, that they were as good as any who walked in “the broad road that led them to destruction?” It is not by any human standard that you will be judged in the last day, but by the standard of God’s unerring word: and whether you be as good or better than others, it will avail you nothing, if you be not found such as God requires, “Israelites indeed, and without guile”———]

2. How desirable is it to have our evidences of piety clear and decisive!

[The question put to us in the text, will be put to us in the last day; “What did ye more than others?” This question we ought to be able to answer now, in order that we may give a satisfactory answer then: and the more satisfactorily we can answer it now, the more comfort we shall have in looking forward to that day, and the more boldness when we shall stand at the judgment-seat of Christ^g. Whatever then ye have attained, forget it all, and press forward for yet higher attainments^h, that so, whenever the day of Christ shall arrive, ye may rejoice, “and not be ashamed before him at his comingⁱ.”]

^g 1 John iii. 20, 21. and iv. 17.

^h Phil. iii. 13, 14.

ⁱ 1 John ii. 28.

MCCCXI.

DIRECTIONS RESPECTING ALMS-DEEDS.

Matt. vi. 1—4. *Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret, himself shall reward thee openly.*

THERE are some duties so plain and obvious, that it is scarcely necessary to insist upon men’s obligation to perform them. Amongst these is the duty of relieving our fellow-creatures in distress, and making

our abundance instrumental to the supply of their necessities. Our blessed Lord takes it for granted that all his disciples will be found observant of the duty itself; and therefore does not stop to inculcate the necessity of it; but merely gives directions respecting it, that it may be performed most beneficially to themselves, and most honourably to God. Instead of the word, which in the first verse is translated “alms,” there is, in the margin of our Bibles, the word “righteousness;” which, on the whole, is the preferable reading; as it avoids the tautology which there manifestly is in the passage as it now stands. The passage according to this reading requires, first, that our righteousness in general should be devoid of ostentation; and, next, that we should guard against ostentation, more especially in those several duties, which, as Christians, we are bound to perform. We are called to serve God with our *souls*, our *bodies*, and *estates*; and we must do the first by *prayer*, the second by *fasting*, and the third by *alms*.

Whichever reading we adopt, our subject will be the same: we shall be led to consider the directions which our Lord gives us in reference to alms. He tells us,

I. What we are to avoid—

A very principal feature in the character of the Pharisees was, *ostentation*: “they did all their works in order to be seen of men.” Against this in particular our Lord cautions us—

1. It is an evil to which we are prone—

[Whilst the caution itself implies this, (“Take heed,”) the experience of every individual attests it. Who does not feel a desire after the applause of man? Who does not consult in too great a degree the opinion of those around him? The more decent amongst the unconverted seem to be actuated by no other motive: whilst even the godly themselves are by no means exempt from its influence. It is not, however, without much self-knowledge and self-examination that we can discern the workings of this principle within us. We give ourselves credit for better motives and better principles, at the time that impartial observers mark distinctly the obliquity of our dispositions and conduct.]

2. It is an evil most carefully to be avoided—

[The bestowing of alms, like every thing else, must be judged of by the motive from which it springs: when done in order to acquire a character for benevolence and liberality, it is pride; when with a view to the obtaining of influence, it is ambition. It is then only to be deemed piety and charity, when it is produced by a concern for God's honour, and from real love to our fellow-creatures. Precisely in proportion as any sinister motive actuates us, the action, how good soever it may be in other respects, is debased. It is not only stripped of all the good which it might otherwise have, but has in it a positive infusion of evil. Our blessed Lord called those "*hypocrites*," who in distributing their alms, sought to draw the attention and admiration of the public: and such are all who tread in their steps. If our actions proceed from principles different from those which are pretended and avowed, we may palliate them as we please; but God will affix to them no other name than that of vile *hypocrisy*. It is scarcely needful, methinks, to say, that such a disposition must be put away with abhorrence.

But there is yet a farther reason for guarding against this evil; namely, that actions proceeding from such a principle can never be accepted of God. They may, and probably will, procure us the reward we seek after: they may render us popular, gain us applause, increase our influence, and bring us into high repute for liberality and goodness: but they will never receive any reward from God: they are not done *for him*; and therefore he will not accept them: they have no real piety in them; and therefore he will not reward them. We can easily see, that, if a person should spend ever so large a sum in feeding those by whose suffrages he is to be raised to eminence and distinction, he would not for a moment imagine that he laid God under any kind of obligation, or was entitled to expect any remuneration from him: the sums he lavished were the price of his worldly honours. Thus, as far as pride, or ostentation, or vanity, or worldly interest, excite us to liberality, we renounce all claim upon God. He has said indeed, that "what we give to the poor, we lend to him; and that he will repay it^a;" but he will never acknowledge as a loan to him, what was given by us to purchase the applause of man. Supposing it was pure gold in the first instance, we turn it all to dross the very moment we begin to pride ourselves in it.

In both these views then the caution deserves our deepest attention, and ought to be followed with the greatest care.]

^a Prov. xix. 17.

Having told us what to avoid, our Lord proceeds to inform us,

II. What we should observe and do—

We should, to the utmost of our power, affect secrecy—

[Doubtless there are occasions whereon we are called to dispense charity in a more public manner, and when the concealment of our name would have an injurious effect. On such occasions we do right to “let our light shine before men.” But, in all such instances, we should have the testimony of our own consciences, that it is the honour of God, and not our own honour that we seek. Where no such necessity is imposed upon us, we should “not let our left hand know what our right hand doeth:” we should hide our good deeds *from others*; we should hide them also *from ourselves*. Where we have not made an open parade of our charities, but have conformed to this precept as it respects others, we yet are too apt to contemplate our own actions with a very undue measure of self-complacency. Though we have not studied to make them public, we are delighted to find that they are known; and are pleased with the thought that we stand high in the estimation of others. The oblique hints which are suggested to us respecting the extent of our benevolence, and the greatness of the benefits we have conferred, are very gratifying to our proud hearts; and the accidental discovery of our goodness is relished by us, as a rich equivalent for the self-denial we exercised in concealing it. Alas! what deceitful hearts we have! At the very time that we profess to avoid the notice of others, we are “sacrificing to our own net, and burning incense to our own drag!” If we view our actions aright, they will furnish us rather with grounds of humiliation and gratitude. For, how small are our utmost exertions, in comparison with the greatness of our obligations, or the extent of our duty! What reason have we also to be ashamed of the mixture of principle, which has often operated to the production of them! And more particularly, what reason have we to adore and magnify our God, who has deigned to make use of such unworthy instruments for the good of his people and the glory of his name! *This* is the light in which our benevolence should be viewed; *this* is the spirit in which it should be exercised.]

What we do secretly for God shall be openly rewarded by him—

[He notices with approbation the hidden purposes of our heart: and every man who seeks only the praise of God shall assuredly obtain it: God will look not at the sums we give,

but at the motive and principle from which we give it: and even "a cup of cold water given with a single eye to his glory, shall in no wise lose its reward." Even a desire which we were not able to carry into effect shall be accepted of him, just as David's was, who desired to build a house for the Lord: "Thou didst well, in that it was in thine heart." How far God will recompense our liberality with present comforts, we cannot absolutely determine; but he will surely "recompense it at the resurrection of the just; and he would account himself unrighteous, if he were to forget to do so^b. This, however, we must ever bear in mind, that our actions are always exalted in God's estimation in proportion as they are lowered in our own: and that the persons whom he represents as honoured and rewarded by him, are those who were altogether unconscious of their own excellencies, and were surprised to hear of services noticed by their Judge, which were overlooked and forgotten by themselves^c.]

From this subject we may LEARN,

1. How impossible it is for any man to be justified by the works of the law—

[We inquire not now into any kind of gross sin: we will suppose that all of us are free from any imputation of that kind; and that our lives have been altogether spent in doing good: yet who amongst us would present his alms-deeds before the heart-searching God, and defy him to find a flaw in them? — — — If we cannot do that, we must renounce all confidence in the flesh, and rely only on the meritorious sacrifice of the Lord Jesus — — —]

2. How thankful we should be that a Saviour is provided for us—

[The Lord Jesus Christ is come into the world to seek and save us. He is that Great High Priest who "bears the iniquity of our holy things," and will clothe us with the unspotted robe of his righteousness, provided we are willing to put off "the filthy rags of our own." Let us look then to him, whose works alone were perfect. Let us remember, that "though we know nothing by ourselves, yet are we not hereby justified:" God may have seen much obliquity in us, where we ourselves may have been perfectly unconscious of it: but if, on the whole, our "eye has been single," our imperfections shall be pardoned, and our services be recompensed with "an eternal great reward."]

^b Heb. vi. 10.

^c Matt. xxv. 44.

MCCCXII.

DIRECTIONS RESPECTING PRAYER.

Matt. vi. 5—8. *And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.*

WHAT David spoke respecting the Pentateuch is strongly exemplified in the Sermon on the Mount; “By it are God’s servants warned.” Both sins and duties are here exhibited to us in their proper light: the sins of the heart are reprobated, no less than those of the outward act: and the duties which are performed without proper motives and dispositions are shewn to be void of any real worth. Hence we are warned to look chiefly at the heart, and to judge of our state entirely by what we find there. If, for instance, we have been in the habit of dispensing alms, we must not *therefore* conclude that we have pleased God, unless, upon an examination of our own hearts, we have the testimony of our conscience that we *desired* to please him. In like manner, if we have been given to prayer, we must not imagine that our prayers have been accepted, unless they have been offered in sincerity and truth. To this effect our Lord teaches us in the words of our text; in which he gives us directions respecting prayer, and guards us against those dispositions which are too frequently indulged in the performance of that duty.

I. Against hypocrisy—

An ostentatious display of devotion is most hateful to God—

[The Pharisees of old were intent only on gaining the applause of man. Hence, on every occasion, they acted a part,

as players on a stage^a. Even their private devotions were made subservient to their main design; and were ostentatiously displayed in places of public concourse. They pretended to have so much reverence for God, that they would not defer their accustomed services even for a few minutes, but would perform them in the corner of a street, or in any other place, however conspicuous and frequented; whilst, in reality, the whole was a contrivance, in order to attract notice, and obtain a high reputation for sanctity. Such persons our Lord justly calls “hypocrites,” and their services he declares to be altogether unacceptable to the heart-searching God.

These precise habits are no longer seen; but the disposition from whence they arose, prevails as much as ever. We shall not now speak of formalists, who frequent the house of God in order to be accounted religious, because we shall notice them under another head: but there are many in the religious world who very nearly resemble the Pharisees of old, whilst they themselves have not the least idea that there is any such defect in their character. I refer to those who are forward to pray and to expound the Scriptures in religious societies, whilst they have no delight in secret prayer, but only in displaying their gifts and talents. I would notice those also, who, in the house of God, use unnecessary peculiarities, whether of voice or gesture, in order that they may appear to be pre-eminently devout. Nor must we overlook those who carry the same hypocritical desires even into their own closets, and contrive, either by the loudness or the length of their devotions, to convey to their families an idea of transcendent piety. But such dispositions, by whomsoever indulged, are hateful to God: and in proportion as we are actuated by them, we debase our best services, and render them an abomination to the Lord.]

In all our approaches to God, we should rather affect privacy and retirement—

[Doubtless, when in the house of God, we ought to conduct ourselves with the deepest reverence: nor should we be afraid of the observations which may be made upon us by ungodly men. Whatever consequences may attend a reverential regard for God, we ought not to put our light under a bushel; but should, like Daniel, brave death itself, rather than for a moment deny our God^b. But where our devotions are professedly private, and no necessity is imposed upon us, we should shun every thing which has the appearance of ostentation or vain-glory, and study to approve ourselves to HIM only, “who seeth in secret.” It is his approbation only that

^a Πρὸς τὸ θεαθῆναι, in ver. 1, seems to convey this idea.

^b Dan. vi. 10.

we should regard; and from him only should we seek “a recompence of reward.”]

At the same time it becomes us to be equally on our guard,

II. Against superstition—

Superstitious services are scarcely less common than those which are hypocritical—

[The Heathen imagined that their gods were to be moved by long services and vain repetitions. Hence the worshippers of Baal cried to him, “O Baal, hear us! O Baal, hear us!” and continued their cry from morning to noon, and with increased earnestness from noon to evening^c. And to this hour a great part of the Christian world (the Papists, I mean) continue a superstition as absurd as any that can be found in the heathen world: they repeat their *Ave-Marias* and their *Paternosters* a great number of times; (keeping an account thereof with their beads;) and then think that they have performed an acceptable service to the Lord, though they have not offered to him one spiritual petition. Happy were it if such superstition were confined to them: but the same thing obtains also amongst ourselves. What is more common than for persons to attend the house of God, and to go through the service in a dull formal manner, and then to return home satisfied with having performed a duty to their God? Yet the religion of many who fancy themselves devout, consists in nothing but a repetition of such services: and if these services be repeated on the week days as well as on the Sabbath, they take credit to themselves for possessing all the piety that God requires. In some things, I confess, these persons set an example worthy the imitation of the religious world: they are always *in their places at the beginning of the service*; and they shew a becoming attention to it throughout the whole, both in their *reverent postures* and their *audible responses*: and, if my voice could reach to every professor of religion throughout the world, I would say, LEARN OF THEM; and *as far as these things go*, IMITATE THEM. Still, however, inasmuch as the religion of these persons consists in forms only, without any suitable emotions of the heart, it is no better than the worship of the heathen: our Lord himself says, that “in vain do any persons worship him, who draw nigh to him with their lips, whilst their hearts are far from him^d.”

Some who are truly enlightened, have yet the remains of this old leaven within them; and are apt to judge of their

^c 1 Kings xviii. 26—29.

^d Matt. xv. 7—9.

state, rather by the number and length of their services, than by the spirituality of their minds in them: and *it would be well if some who minister in holy things, and who multiply their services beyond what their strength will endure, would attend to this hint.*]

But we should have more correct notions of the Deity, than to imagine that he requires, or accepts, such services as these—

[We mean not to say, that persons may not profitably and acceptably prolong their services to any extent, when their spirits are devout and their hearts are enlarged; for our Lord himself spent whole nights in prayer and in communion with his God: nor do we say, that all repetitions of the same requests must necessarily be superstitious; for our Lord himself, thrice within the space of one hour, retired for prayer, and poured out his soul in the very same words^e: but we must be understood to say, that the acceptableness of our prayers does not depend on the length of them. God does not need to be informed, or to be persuaded, by us: he is *omniscient*, and “knows what we need, before we ask him;” and he is *all-merciful*, and is infinitely more ready to give than we are to ask. We mistake the nature of prayer altogether, if we think that God is prevailed upon by it to do what he was otherwise averse to do. It is true, he requires us to be importunate^f: but such expressions as these are not to be strained beyond their proper import: the use of prayer is, to affect our own souls with a deep sense of our guilt and misery; to acknowledge our entire dependence upon God; to raise our expectations from him; and to prepare our hearts for a grateful reception of his blessings; that, when he has answered our petitions, we may give him the glory due unto his name. It is a truth not generally known, that the very disposition to pray is a gift from God; and that God does not give *because* we pray, but stirs us up to pray, because he has before determined to give: and this truth, well digested in the mind, will keep us equally from a *presumptuous neglect* of prayer, on the one hand, and from a *superstitious use* of it, on the other.]

In addition to the foregoing cautions, we will suggest two or three others, arising out of a more minute attention to the text, which will serve as a further APPLICATION of the subject—

Guard then,

1. Against neglect of prayer—

^e Matt. xxvi. 44.

^f Luke xi. 8—10. and xviii. 7, 8.

[Our Lord does not here directly enjoin prayer as a duty, but he *takes for granted* that all his followers will pray. On any other supposition than this, his directions would lose all their force. In a subsequent part of this sermon he both enjoins it as a duty, and suspends on the performance of it all hopes of obtaining blessings from God. In truth, it is not possible for a child of God to neglect prayer. Prayer is the very breath of a regenerate soul: and “as the body without the spirit is dead,” so the soul, without those spiritual affections which go forth to God in prayer, is dead also. As soon as ever Saul was converted to God, the testimony of God respecting him was, “Behold, he prayeth^g.” Those who neglect prayer, are decidedly ranked among the workers of iniquity^h, on whom God will pour out his everlasting vengeanceⁱ. Think then, beloved, how many there are amongst us, who have reason to tremble for their state! O that every prayerless person would lay this thought to heart! — — —]

2. Against formality in prayer—

[Prayer is a service of the *heart*, and not merely of the lip and knee. It is a “pouring out of the soul before God,” and “a stirring up of ourselves to lay hold on God.” Let none then deceive themselves with mere formal services, whether public or private. As to the circumstance of using a preconcerted form of words, *that* makes no difference either way: a person may pray *spiritually with a form*, or *formally without one*. The true point to be ascertained is, Do the feelings and desires of our souls correspond with the expressions of our lips? If they do, *that* is acceptable prayer; if not, it is altogether worthless in the sight of God. In the foregoing address, we have warned *the infidel and profane*: in this we would warn *the superstitious and hypocritical*. Yes: we must testify against them, that God looketh at the *heart*; and that they never will find acceptance with him, till they come to “worship him in spirit and in truth” — — —]

3. Against unbelief in prayer—

[It is our duty not only to pray, but to pray in faith. We are to draw nigh to God as “a Father,” and as “our” Father. It is our privilege to “have access to him with boldness and with confidence by faith in the Lord Jesus.” We “should lift up holy hands to him, without doubting.” We are told that “if we waver in our minds, we must not expect to receive any thing at his hands^k.” Let us then come to him with enlarged hearts: let us “open our mouths wide, that he may fill them.” Let us *ask*, whatever we feel that we stand in need of: and, when

^g Acts ix. 11. ^h Ps. xiv. 4. ⁱ Jer. x. 25. ^k Jam. i. 6, 7.

we have asked all that we are able to express, let us *think* what unsearchable gifts he has further to bestow: and when we have exhausted our store of words and thoughts, let us remember that he is "able to give us exceeding abundantly above all that we can *ask* or *think*." Petitions offered in such a frame as this, will never be unacceptable: such addresses will never be considered as "vain repetitions," even though they were offered every hour in the day. Indeed, such a frame as this is intended by the Apostle, when he bids us to "pray without ceasing:" and such devotions will surely bring with them a rich reward: even in this world will God "reward" them, and "*openly*" too, by the manifestations of his love and the communications of his grace: and, in the world to come, he will say concerning us, as of Nathanael of old, "Behold an Israelite indeed," a man of prayer: "I saw him under the fig-tree," and in other places whither he retired for prayer; and I now, in the presence of the assembled universe, bear testimony to him as a faithful servant, that shall inherit the kingdom, and possess the glory which I have prepared for him.]

MCCCXIII.

HALLOWING GOD'S NAME.

Matt. vi. 9. *After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.*

IT is of the utmost importance to every human being, to know how he shall approach his God with acceptance. Hence some even of the heathen philosophers endeavoured to instruct their disciples how to pray^a. We do not find indeed any form of prayer provided for the Jews, with the exception of some short passages which may be regarded in that light^b. But in the New Testament we are informed that John the Baptist gave special instructions to his disciples respecting prayer; and our blessed Lord composed a prayer which should be used by his followers, and should serve also as a pattern for prayer to his Church in all ages^c. If it be thought that it was intended only for his disciples in their infantine state, previous to the

^a Plato, in his Dialogue on Prayer, represents Socrates as teaching Alcibiades how to pray.

^b Numb. vi. 22—26. and x. 35, 36. and Hos. xiv. 2, 3.

^c Compare the text with Luke xi. 2.

out-pouring of the Spirit upon them, let it be remembered, that it was recorded by the Evangelists a great many years after the full establishment of Christianity, without any hint of its use having been superseded: and consequently, we have the same reason to use it as the form and pattern of our supplications, as the Apostles themselves had: the only difference is, that as our Lord more clearly taught them afterwards to offer their petitions in his name, we must avail ourselves of that further information, to render our prayers more acceptable to God.

It being our intention to enter at large into the consideration of this prayer, we shall confine ourselves at present to that portion of it which we have read; in which are two things to be noticed:

I. The invocation—

It is to God alone, and not to creatures, whether angels or men, that we are to address our prayers: “God is a jealous God, and will not give his glory to another.” But to him we are invited to draw nigh; and are taught to regard him,

1. As a loving Father—

[Under this title God was known to his people of old. Indeed it was the appellation, which, in their eyes, was the surest pledge of his love^d: the appellation too in which he himself appeared peculiarly to delight^e. And well may it be a comfort to us to be permitted to address him by this endearing name: for, if he be a Father, he will pity our weakness^f, and pardon our sins^g, and supply our every want^h. True, if we have no nearer connexion with him than the ungodly world, and are his children only by creation, we can derive comparatively but little comfort from it, because we are in rebellion against him: but if we be his children by adoption and grace, what may we not expect at his hands? When we come to him as members of that great family, pleading for ourselves individually, and for the whole collectively, and addressing him in the name of all, as “*our* Father,” methinks he cannot turn away his ear from us: “We may ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us.” Only let us come with “a spirit of adoption, crying, Abba, Father!” and, however “wide we may open our mouths, he will fill them.”]

^d Isai. lxiii. 16.

^e Jer. iii. 4, 19.

^f Ps. ciii. 13.

^g Luke xv. 20.

^h Luke xi. 11—13.

2. As an almighty Friend—

[When we are taught to address God as our Father “which is in heaven,” we are not to understand it as distinguishing him from our earthly parents, but as intended to impress our minds with a sense of his majesty: to remind us, that he sees every thing which passes upon earth, and that he has all power to relieve us, to the utmost extent of our necessities. The consideration that he is *our Father*, encourages us to come “with boldness and with confidence;” but the thought that he is that “high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity,” and dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto; the thought that he knows even the most secret motions of our hearts, and is alike able to save or to destroy; these considerations, I say, are calculated to beget a holy fear in our minds, and to temper our boldness with reverential awe.

Such are the feelings which should be blended in our hearts, whenever we draw nigh to a throne of grace. We should go to God as our Father; but, remembering that “he is in heaven and we upon earth, we should address him in words select and fewⁱ.”]

Let us now turn our attention to,

II. The address—

In this prayer there are six different petitions; three for the advancement of God's honour, and three for the promotion of our happiness. The former having the precedence, may fitly teach us, that a regard for God's honour ought to be first in our intention and desire. Yet it may well be doubted whether the address which is presented to God in our text, is a *petition*, or a *thankful acknowledgment*. Perhaps, in so concise a form as this, *both* may be properly included. Agreeably to this idea we shall consider the address,

1. As eucharistic—

[Though not generally regarded in this light, it seems naturally enough to bear this construction, inasmuch as it accords exactly with the feelings of a devout soul, when impressed and animated with a sense of God's paternal love. Suppose a person to have been meditating on the perfections of his God, the stupendous display of his love and mercy in Christ Jesus, his covenant engagements to his believing people, and the innumerable benefits conferred upon them; suppose him also to be warmed with the thought that this God is *his*

ⁱ Eccl. v. 2.

God, his *Father*, and “his *eternal great reward*,” what would be the *first* effusions of his soul? Would he not burst forth into praises and adorations, and even labour for words whereby to express his love and gratitude towards him? Thus it was with David on many occasions^k; and thus it will be with all who truly delight themselves in God. Sometimes, no doubt, the believer’s mind will be led to dwell rather on other subjects, whether of confession or petition, as circumstances may require: but where nothing extraordinary has occurred to distract his attention, sure I am that the language of adoration is most expressive of his feelings, and most suited to his state.]

2. As supplicatory—

[The Christian will not be satisfied with his own personal endeavours to honour God. But will wish and pray that the whole universe may render him the honour due unto his name. Hence he will beg of God to banish from the world all ignorance and error; and so to reveal himself to mankind, that all may be constrained to shew forth his praise — — — This, I say, is nigh unto the heart of the believer: he will long to promote it to the utmost of his power^l: he will pant after it, as an object of his most anxious desires^m: and he would be glad if every creature, rational and irrational, animate and inanimate, could unite in this as their one blest employⁿ.]

Hence we may LEARN,

1. How glorious is the liberty of God’s praying people—

[They are rescued from the dominion of *slavish fears* and *selfish desires*. “Happy art thou, O Israel, O people saved by the Lord!” Inexpressibly happy are all whose hearts accord with the language of our text! Methinks they resemble, as nearly as such imperfect creatures can, the inhabitants of the realms of light. The cherubim around the throne veil their faces and their feet, in token of that reverential awe which they feel in the presence of the Deity: and the glorified saints cast down their crowns before the footstool of their Lord, to express their sense of their unworthiness of the mercies vouchsafed unto them; whilst the whole united choir vie with each other in hallelujahs to God and to the Lamb. Thus it is with the saints on earth, both in their secret chambers and in the house of God: they are filled with adoring thoughts of God their Saviour, and “rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and glorified.” Doubtless they experience changes in their frames, and

^k Ps. ix. 1, 2. and ciii. 1—5.

^m Ps. lxvii. 2—5.

^l Ps. lvii. 7—11.

ⁿ Ps. cxlviii. 1—11.

seem at times almost to have forgotten their high privileges: but in their better seasons they shew forth the power of divine grace, and enjoy an antepast of heaven. O that all of us might know their blessedness, by sweet experience!]

2. What losers are they who neglect prayer—

[The generality of people account prayer a drudgery: but they are bitter enemies to their own souls. What loss do they suffer in having God for an enemy, when they might have him for their Friend and Father! As for God, *he* suffers no loss: if they refuse to glorify him willingly, he will glorify himself upon them against their will. Reflect then, brethren, what sufferers you are, whilst you are turning your back on God! You have no Father to go to in the time of trouble; no sweet assurance that Almighty wisdom and power are exercised for your support; no anticipations of the blessedness of heaven. On the contrary, all your enjoyments are empty, all your prospects dark. In this world you have little happiness above the beasts; and in the world to come, an eternity of unavailing sorrows. O that you would now begin to pray! O that God might say of you this day, as he did of Saul immediately after his conversion, “Behold, he prayeth!” Then, however desperate your case may now appear, you should soon be received into the family of your God, and be partakers of his inheritance for evermore.]

MCCCXIV.

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

Matt. vi. 10. *Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.*

HIGHLY as the Lord's Prayer is esteemed amongst us, and frequently as it is used, there is scarcely any part of Scripture less considered: we are contented with repeating the words, without ever attending to its true import. The fact is, that though it is written for the use of all, none can use it aright but the true Christian: it is the Christian only, whose heart can embrace the subjects contained in it.

The first petition which we are taught to offer, is, that God's “name may be hallowed” and adored. The two next petitions (which now come under our consideration) are intimately connected with it; they have respect to,

I. The universal establishment of his kingdom—

The kingdom, for the establishment of which we pray, is that of the Messiah—

[The dominion which God exercises by his providence, cannot be more universal than it is: “his kingdom ruleth over all.” But the government which he maintains over the souls of men has in every age been extremely limited and partial. *That* is the kingdom which God has determined to erect: of *that* the prophets have distinctly prophesied^a, and declared that it should be subjected to “Messiah the Prince^b :” its extent is to be universal^c, and its duration to the end of time^d.

The time was now at hand when the foundations of this kingdom were to be laid: and there was a general expectation, both among the godly^e and the ungodly^f, that measures for its establishment would speedily be adopted. True it is, that few, if any, sufficiently advert to the *spiritual nature* of this kingdom: but our Lord gradually rectified the apprehensions of his followers respecting it: and taught them to expect the long-wished-for period; and to pray that nothing might be able to retard its arrival. Some have thought, that, since the establishment of Christianity in the world, there is no further occasion for this petition: but there is, in fact, the same occasion for it now as there was at the first moment it was suggested to the disciples: the only difference between their use of it and ours is, that *they* prayed for the commencement of this kingdom, and *we* for its progressive and final establishment. Indeed, the kingdom itself will never have attained its utmost bounds, till every enemy of it be put under the Messiah’s feet, and every subject of it be perfected in glory.]

Nor can this event have too prominent a place in our prayers—

[After the general petition that God’s name may be glorified, we are taught immediately to desire the advent of the Messiah’s kingdom. Nor is this without reason: for it is by the establishment of this kingdom, and by that alone, that God’s name can ever be sanctified in the earth. Look at the Heathen world, who are worshipping devils, or bowing down to stocks and stones: what glory has the Lord from them? Look at those who are carried away by the Mahometan delusion, or hardened by Jewish infidelity: these profess indeed to acknowledge the one true God; but they cast his word behind them, and are avowed enemies to his only-begotten Son. Look at the

^a Dan. ii. 44.

^b Dan. vii. 13, 14.

^c Ibid.

^d 1 Cor. xv. 24, 25.

^e Luke ii. 38. and Mark xv. 43.

^f Luke xvii. 20, 21.

Christian world, by whom he is dishonoured no less than by any of those whom we have before mentioned : with the exception of a little remnant whom he has renewed by his grace, there is not one on earth that truly loves him, or cordially adores him : all have some idol in their hearts which they prefer to him, some darling lust which they will not sacrifice for his sake. Here surely is abundant reason why we should entreat him to put forth his almighty power for the conversion of the world.

Let this petition then be offered by us with constancy, and with an earnestness proportioned to its importance. Let us pray that "the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified amongst us : " that he would "gird his sword upon his thigh, and ride on in the cause of meekness and truth and righteousness ; " till "all the kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of the Lord and of his Christ."

God requires this at our hands ; nay more, the creation itself demands it of us. "The whole creation are represented as groaning and travelling in pain together" in expectation of this event^g ; and therefore may well be considered as calling on us to exert ourselves in every possible way for their complete deliverance. Whenever then we contemplate the state of those around us, or extend our views to the Heathen world, let us lift up our hearts to God, and pray, "Thy kingdom come."]

Closely connected with this petition is that which next occurs, for,

II. The unlimited execution of his will—

This will flow from the former, as an effect inseparable from it. We cannot approve ourselves subjects of the Redeemer's kingdom in any other way than by our obedience to his will. Hence we are taught to pray, that God's will may be done by ourselves and all mankind, even as it is done in heaven : and *that* too,

1. In a way of cheerful acquiescence—

[The angels, notwithstanding they dwell immediately in the presence of their God, and behold "the works which he doeth for the children of men," are yet not privy to his ultimate designs ; nor do they understand the full scope of all that they behold. As, under the Mosaic dispensation, the cherubim upon the mercy-seat were formed in a bending posture, looking down upon the ark, in order, as it were, to search out the

^g Rom. viii. 21—23.

mysteries contained in it, so are the angels represented by St. Peter as “desiring to look into” the Gospel salvation^h; and St. Paul says, that the revelation which God has with progressive clearness made of himself unto the Church, is no less instructive to *them* than to usⁱ. But we are well assured that they never for a moment doubt either the wisdom or goodness of God in any of his dispensations^k. In this they are a fit pattern for our imitation. *We* know not the secret purposes of God in any thing that he does: his ways are in the great deep, and his footsteps are not known. But we should be satisfied in our minds, that “he does, and will do, all things well;” and that, though “clouds and darkness are round about him, righteousness and judgment are the basis of his throne.” However mysterious his ways may appear, we should at all times solace ourselves with this, that “what we know not now, we shall know hereafter.” Were this spirit universally prevalent, discontent would be utterly banished from the world. Under the most afflictive dispensations we should maintain a humble composure and a thankful frame^l. What a desirable state! how honourable to God! and what a source of happiness to man!]

2. In a way of active obedience—

[Here also are the angels a pattern for us: they are “ministers of God, to do his pleasure; and they do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word^m.” The very first intimation of the Divine will is quite sufficient for them. Whatever the office be, whether to deliver Lot from Sodom, or to destroy a hundred and eighty-five thousand Assyrians, they execute it with equal readiness and equal pleasure. Thus should *we* engage in the service of our God: it should be “our meat and our drink to do his will:” we should hearken diligently to his word, in order to learn what we have to do; and then we should do it without hesitation, without weariness, without reserve. Nor should we be satisfied with having our own souls brought into this state; we should long to see every sinner upon earth, and “every thought of his heart, captivated in like manner to the obedience of Christ.” The Apostle’s prayer should be the language both of our hearts and lipsⁿ.

But who can effect this change? Who can subdue the unruly wills and affections of sinful men? None but God: he must “make them willing in the day of his power, or they will

^h 1 Pet. i. 12.

ⁱ Eph. iii. 10.

^k Rev. xvi. 5—7. and xix. 1—4.

^l Isai. xxxix. 8. 1 Sam. iii. 18. 2 Sam. xv. 25, 26.

^m Ps. ciii. 20, 21.

ⁿ Heb. xiii. 20, 21.

continue in their rebellion even to the end. To him therefore we should look; and to him should we make our supplication, that he would "reveal his arm," and subdue the nations to the obedience of faith.]

From this directory for prayer, we cannot but OBSERVE,

1. What elevation of mind religion inspires—

[Statesmen and philosophers, however enlarged their minds, are occupied solely about the things of time and sense: whereas the Christian, even though he be poor and illiterate, "separates himself" for the pursuit of higher objects, and "seeketh and intermeddleth with heavenly wisdom^o." *The universal establishment of the Messiah's kingdom, and the unlimited execution of the Divine will, the bringing down of heaven to earth, and the assimilating of earth to heaven, these are the subjects of his daily meditation: these are the objects of his most ardent desire. The men of science justly value themselves on having enjoyed the blessings of education: they know and feel the benefit of having their thoughts raised to the contemplation of objects that are out of the reach of vulgar and illiterate minds. But the Christian surpasses them incomparably more than they surpass the lowest of mankind: his meditations are more noble; his mind is more enlarged. Let us learn then to form a proper estimate of religion; and to regard it with the veneration it deserves.]*

2. What happiness it is calculated to produce—

[Let these petitions be answered; let this state of things prevail; let the Messiah reign in the hearts of all mankind; let the example of angels be emulated by every human being. Will any one say, that *this* would *lessen* the happiness of the world? Will any one say that he even feels a doubt upon the subject? No: we are all convinced in our consciences, that in proportion as we approximated to the holiness of angels, we should also participate their bliss. See what it is that occasions by far the greater part of misery in the world: "Whence spring wars and fightings amongst us, but from the lusts which war in our members?" It is to the same source that we must trace the greater part of our bodily disorders and our mental troubles. Sin is the parent of misery in ten thousand different forms: and it is religion alone that can heal the wounds which sin has made. If any who profess religion are not happy, the fault is not in religion, but in them: they have either erroneous notions of God's kingdom, or a partial regard for his will. Let them only possess the dispositions implied in these prayers, and they will have a very heaven upon earth^p.]

^o Prov. xviii. 1.

^p See Isai. lx. 19, 20.

MCCCXV.

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

Matt. vi. 11. *Give us this day our daily bread.*

IN those petitions which relate to the glory of God, that occurs first which is the most comprehensive and the most important: in these which relate to the welfare of man, a different order is observed. The comfortable support of our bodies, instead of being of chief importance, is, when compared with spiritual blessings, quite insignificant. Yet is a petition respecting that with great propriety placed first; because, unless our bodies be preserved in life, there will be no further scope for the communication of grace on God's part, or the exercise of it on ours. The subject of this petition indeed is such, as many would think scarcely worthy of a place in so short a summary of prayer as that before us: but our Lord did not account it so; and therefore we should not.

That we may form a right judgment concerning it, let us consider,

I. The import of this petition—

There are two things in it which call for explanation:

1. The general scope of it—

[Some have thought, that, because Christ is represented as “the bread of life” which every one must eat, we are here taught to pray for the knowledge and enjoyment of HIM: whilst others have thought, that the prayer referred to the sacramental bread, which in the primitive Church was partaken of daily by the whole body of believers. But neither of these interpretations accords with the terms in which the petition is conveyed. The plain and literal sense of the words seems to be that which was intended by our Lord. It may be thought strange indeed, that, when three petitions only are suggested for the welfare of man, one of them should be confined to his bodily concerns. But it must be remembered, that those are the concerns in which we are most apt to overlook the interpositions of Heaven; and consequently, that we particularly need to have this very direction given us. Nor is it a small matter to acknowledge the agency of God in things of such apparently inferior moment: for it leads us to

realize the thought of an overruling Providence in every thing, even in the death of a sparrow, or the falling of a hair of our head.]

2. The particular limitations contained in it—

[*The thing which we pray for*, is limited to the *necessaries* of life. This is the general acceptation of the term “bread” in Scripture: it comprehends all the things which are needful for the body, but not any luxuries or superfluities. Doubtless those necessities will vary according to our rank and situation in life, and according to the numbers we have dependent on us for support: and what would be a superfluity under some circumstances, would be no more than absolutely necessary under other circumstances: but, due respect being had to these things, this must be the limit of our requests. If we ask for any thing, “to consume it upon our lusts, we ask amiss^a.”

The measure also of these necessities is limited. We are not to ask for a store on which we may subsist for a time independent of God; but simply for such things as are requisite for our *present subsistence*. The term that is used in our text^b is indeed variously interpreted: but, when compared with the corresponding passage in St. Luke^c, its meaning will evidently appear to be that which our translators have affixed to it: we pray from day to day, that God will give us what is necessary for the day. We are not even to “take thought for the morrow;” at least, not so as to feel any anxious care respecting it^d: for we know not that we shall be alive on the morrow: or, if we be spared, we know that He who provided for us yesterday and to-day, can do the same to-morrow: on Him therefore we should “cast our care, believing that he careth for us,” and that he *will* provide whatever in his wisdom he shall see good for us. In every place, in every event, in every thing, we should see, as it were, that name inscribed, “*Jehovah-jireh*,” The Lord will provide^e.]

Now this petition will be found extremely important, if we consider,

II. The instruction to be derived from it—

We need not put any forced interpretation on our text in order to render it instructive; for,

It TEACHES us many practical lessons that are of great importance:

1. That we should be moderate in our desires of earthly things—

^a Jam. iv. 3.

^b ἐπιουσιον.

^c Luke xi. 3. τὸ καθ' ἡμέραν.

^d ver. 34.

^e Gen. xxii. 8, 14.

[Our hearts are naturally set on earthly things. Our Lord tells us, that the Gentiles think of little except what they shall eat, and drink, and wear^f. And it is precisely thus with the great mass of those who bear the Christian name. The heathen themselves do not exceed us in an eager pursuit after the good things of this life. Nor is perfect contentment known even among those who possess the largest fortunes: there is always something beyond their present attainments, which they are aspiring after, and anxious to possess. But it should not, nor indeed can it, be thus with any true Christian. The man who sees the worth and excellence of heavenly things can no longer pant after the worthless things of time and sense: he is like a man, who, having looked at the sun, sees a dark spot upon every earthly object. From that moment, Agur's wish is his^g: in his addresses to his heavenly Father, he can ask for nothing more than food and raiment^h: possessing that, he is contentⁱ: or even if he do not possess it, he "knows how to suffer need as well as to abound^k;" and, when "having nothing, feels that he possesses all things^l."

Let this lesson then be learned by us: and let every one of us apply to himself that solemn caution, "Seekest thou great things unto thyself? Seek them not^m."]

2. That we should depend on God's providence for the supply of them—

[God is the true source of temporal, no less than of spiritual blessings. It is he who causeth the earth to bring forthⁿ, and instructs men how to cultivate it to advantage^o: and, without his blessing, all our labours would terminate in disappointment^p. The whole creation subsists upon his kind and bounteous provision^q. Now because we have so long been habituated to receive the productions of the earth, either spontaneously presenting themselves to us, or rewarding the labours of our hands, we are very apt to overlook the Donor, and to forget our dependence upon God. But we are in fact as dependent on him as "the fowls of the air, which neither sow, nor reap, nor gather into barns:" and we should *in the habit of our minds* live upon his providence, precisely as the Israelites did in the wilderness; and receive "our daily bread" at his hands, as much as if it were daily given to us from the clouds. We are indeed to labour for the things which are necessary for the body, as well as for those which pertain to the soul. The prohibition which our Lord gave respecting this, is not absolute,

^f ver. 32.

ⁱ 1 Tim. vi. 8.

^m Jer. xlv. 5.

^p Hag. i. 6.

^g Prov. xxx. 8, 9.

^k Phil. iv. 11, 12.

ⁿ Ps. civ. 14, 15.

^q Ps. civ. 27, 28.

^h Gen. xxviii. 20.

^l 2 Cor. vi. 10.

^o Deut. viii. 17, 18.

but only comparative^r. If we will not labour for ourselves, we have no claim for assistance either from God or man^s. Nevertheless, when we have laboured with ever so much skill and diligence, we must bear in mind, that “our daily bread is as truly the *gift*” of God, as if we had not laboured for it at all: and our hope for the future must be in him alone, as much as if we were, like Elijah, subsisting daily on provision brought to us by ravens.]

3. That, whatever be the portion which God sees fit to give us, we should be therewith content—

[A person who should form his judgment by outward appearances, would think that there is an exceeding great difference between the comforts of the rich and of the poor. But there is really far less difference than we are apt to imagine. The richest man has no security for his possessions: experience proves, that kings may be hurled from their thrones, and nobles be reduced to subsist on charity. Moreover, whilst men possess their wealth, they may, by disease of body or perturbation of mind, be deprived of all comfort, and be made to envy the poorest man who is in the enjoyment of health and peace. But the pious poor have necessities secured to them on the most inviolable of all tenures, the promise of a faithful God^t. Besides, the rich have very little conception of the happiness that is derived from seeing the hand of God in their daily provision. This happiness is reserved for the poor. *They* are constrained to feel their dependence on God: and, when they receive their supplies, they often behold such peculiar circumstances attending them, as mark in the strongest manner the interposition of the Deity in their behalf. Can any one doubt whether provision sent in such a way be enjoyed with a greater zest than that which is supplied out of our own store? Surely the thoughts which arise in the mind of a poor man on such occasions, which fill his eyes with tears of gratitude, and his mouth with songs of praise, are an infinitely richer feast than all the luxuries which even royal wealth could procure. Let not any then be discontented with their lot: “the rich and the poor meet together” far more nearly than is generally supposed^u: “A man’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things that he possesseth,” but in the blessing which he enjoys along with it: “The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich; and he addeth no sorrow with it^x.” Our blessed Lord, who often wanted bread to eat, and “a place where to lay his head,” has sanctified a state of want, and shewn that

^r John vi. 27.

^s 2 Thess. iii. 12.

^t Matt. vi. 33. Ps. xxxiv. 10.

^u Prov. xxii. 2.

^x Prov. x. 22.

the Father's love is not to be judged of by his external dispensations, or his children's happiness materially affected by them. Are any of you then under circumstances of trial? Be of good cheer: it is a small matter: it is a small matter for your bodies to be in want, provided "your souls be satisfied with the plenteousness of your Father's house." Only "eat abundantly" of "the living bread," "which is meat indeed;" and then the scantiest pittance that you can subsist upon shall be sweet as honey or the honeycomb. Feed richly, I say, on *that*; and "you shall never hunger," as long as the world shall stand^y. As it respects your body, "your bread shall be given you, and your water shall be sure;" and, as it respects your soul, you shall evermore "delight yourself in fatness^z."

^y John vi. 35, 55.

^z Isai. xxxiii. 16. and lv. 2.

MCCCXVI.

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

Matt. vi. 12. *And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*

THE petitions of men to the Supreme Being will be presented in a different order, according to the general state of their minds, or according to the particular circumstances in which they are placed. A person just awakened to a sense of his guilt and danger, would most probably assign the first place in his petitions to that which, at such a season, would press most forcibly upon his mind—the obtaining of reconciliation with an offended God. But when he has obtained peace with God, and is enabled to come to him as a child unto his father, his slavish fear gives way to an ingenuous concern for his father's honour, and his own personal safety occupies a less prominent situation in his prayers. Not that he is less interested in the welfare of his soul than before; but he is more interested in other concerns, which, at the first, had no place in his thoughts. Accordingly we find, in that form of prayer which our Lord himself has prescribed as the most perfect, this order is observed. The devout soul is first led to express its concern for the universal establishment of the Redeemer's

kingdom; and then, after one petition for the preservation of its existence in the body, it is taught to implore the pardon of all its multiplied transgressions. This is the portion of that prayer which we are at this time to consider: and in it we shall notice,

I. The petition itself—

To pray for the forgiveness of our sins is,

1. Universally necessary—

[Sins are here spoken of under the notion of debts: for as by the preceptive part of the law we are bound to obedience, so by the sanctions of the law there is laid upon us an obligation to suffer punishment in case of disobedience. Our sins therefore are debts which we owe to divine justice for our violations of the laws of God. And who is there among the children of men that has not many debts to be forgiven? That there is a great difference between different persons in respect to the guilt they have contracted, we readily acknowledge; but “there is no man that liveth and sinneth not:” “in many things we all offend:” “if any say that they have not sinned, they make God a liar, and his word is not in them:” for his testimony respecting the whole race of mankind is, that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God;” and, consequently, that “every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before him.”

What then must be done? Can any one discharge his own debt? If any will attempt it, what method will he pursue? If he will obey the law in future, that will no more satisfy its demands for past disobedience than the ceasing to increase a debt will discharge a debt that is already contracted. If he will endeavour to atone for his sins by tears of penitence, rivers of tears will never suffice to wash away one sin. There is but one possible remedy remaining for him; and that is, to cast himself upon the mercy of God, and to implore forgiveness for the Redeemer's sake. *In this respect* all are upon a level: whether our sins have been greater or less, this is the only way in which we can return to God with any hope of acceptance. The proud self-justifying Pharisee will be dismissed with abhorrence; and those only who come in the spirit of the self-abasing publican will obtain mercy at his hands.

There are two sorts of persons indeed, who are apt to indulge very erroneous conceptions on this subject: some suppose that they are so *completely justified* as not to need any renewed *applications* for pardon: and others, that they are so *perfectly sanctified* as not to have any fresh *occasion* for pardon. But as David, after God by Nathan had sealed his pardon, still

implored mercy at the hands of God^a, so must we: and they who fancy themselves living in a sinless state, are proud deceivers of their own souls^b. There is not a day or an hour in which any human being has not just occasion to offer the petition in our text: the corruption of his nature, the transgressions of his former life, and the imperfections of his very best services, all require it of him^c.]

2. Infinitely important—

[Consider the state of a man whose iniquities are not forgiven: God, the Almighty God, is his enemy^d—— He is every moment in danger of dropping into hell^e—— He neither has, nor can have, any solid peace in his mind^f—— He lives but to aggravate his guilt, and augment his condemnation^g—— Can any one reflect on this, and not see the importance of urging the petition in our text? The only wonder is, that any person in an unforgiven state can close his eyes in sleep, or give attention to any of the concerns of time or sense, till he has implored mercy at the hands of his offended God.]

But whilst the general importance of this petition is obvious, there certainly is some obscurity in,

II. The limitation or condition annexed to it—

To understand this part of the Lord's Prayer aright, we must compare the expressions as recorded by St. Luke, with those which are used in the text. St. Luke says, "Forgive us, *for* we forgive others^h:" but in the text we pray, "Forgive us, *as* we forgive others." Now we cannot doubt but that both the Evangelists have given the prayer with accuracy, so far at least as not to comprehend in it any thing which was not intended by our Lord. We, therefore, shall take the petition in both views, and consider it as importing,

1. A profession of our readiness to forgive others—

[This is a frame of mind which God requires in all who come to him for mercy: and he warns us not to expect mercy at his hands whilst we are indisposed to exercise it towards

^a Compare 2 Sam. xii. 13. with Ps. li. ^b 1 John i. 8. Jam. iii. 2.

^c See John xiii. 10. As they who have walked in a bath yet need to wash their feet on account of the defilement contracted in coming from it, *so*, &c.

^d Ps. vii. 11—13.

^e Luke xii. 20.

^f Isai. lvii. 20, 21.

^g Rom. ii. 5.

^h Luke xi. 4.

othersⁱ. Such is the explanation which our Lord himself gives of his own words^k: and, taken in this sense, they are a kind of plea with God to grant us our desire, and an encouragement to ourselves to expect it. The duty of forgiving others being imposed upon us as a condition, without the performance of which God will not forgive us, a consciousness of having performed the duty emboldens us to ask forgiveness at his hands. Moreover, whilst we thus appeal to God respecting our endeavours to obey his commandments, we do in effect acknowledge the agency of his Spirit, and the efficacy of his grace; without which we should have neither the ability nor inclination to fulfil his will^l. In this view then it is also encouraging; for, if God has already bestowed his grace upon us, and we have a clear evidence of it by its operation on our hearts and lives, we may reasonably hope, that he will yet further extend his mercy to us in the pardon of all our sins: we may regard his past favours as a pledge and earnest of others yet to come, and especially of those which our souls most need, and which he himself is most ready to bestow.]

2. A consent that the mercy we shew to others should be made the pattern of God's mercy to us—

[We cannot with propriety request, that the forgiveness which we exercise towards others may be the *measure* of that which we would receive from God; (because every thing we do is so extremely imperfect:) but the *pattern* it may and ought to be. Of course, as in the former case, when we speak of a *condition*, we are not to be understood as if there were any thing *meritorious* in forgiving others, or as if God bargained with us, as it were, and bartered away his mercies: so, in the present case, we are not to be understood as if there were, or could be, any thing in us that was worthy of God's imitation. There is a sense in which we are to be "pure, as God is pure," and "perfect, as he is perfect:" and, in a similar sense, though not with equal strictness, we may beg of God to forgive us our offences, as we forgive our offending fellow-creatures; that is, freely, fully, cordially, and for ever.

True it is that, in offering this petition, we need to speak "with fear and trembling;" lest there be in our hearts any root of bitterness unperceived by us, and lest, when praying for forgiveness, we do in effect pray, that we be *not* forgiven. And, that no doubt may exist respecting our sincerity in forgiving others, we ought to be rendering good for evil, and "heaping thereby coals of fire on the heads" of our enemies, to melt them into love. Then may we use this petition with safety, with confidence, and with comfort.]

ⁱ Jam. ii. 13.

^k ver. 14, 15.

^l Phil. ii. 13.

From this view of our subject, we LEARN,

1. The temper of a Christian—

[Knowing that his own debt to God is ten thousand talents, and that his fellow-creature can at the utmost owe to him only a few pence, the Christian dares not take him by the throat unmercifully, lest God should retaliate on *him*, and require at *his* hands the debt, which the whole universe could never pay. Freely has he received remission; and freely does he grant it, even to those who may have injured him in the highest degree. All bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, are put away from him, with all malice: and he is kind, tender-hearted, and forgiving towards others, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven him^m.

Let us examine then whether this be indeed *our* character: let us search whether our mode of speaking of others, and of acting towards them, accord with it: for, if we bring our gift to the altar with an unforgiving spirit, God bids us to “go our way,” and not presume to expect any tokens of his favour, till the most perfect reconciliation has been sought with our offending or offended brotherⁿ.]

2. The privilege of a Christian—

[Here God permits, encourages, commands us to ask of him the free and full pardon of all our sins. No consideration whatever is had to the number or greatness of them: the command is given to every human being; and the fullest possible assurance, that none shall ask in vain^o.

Some however have thought, that, because no mention is here made of Christ and his atonement, we need not to have respect to *him* in our addresses at the throne of grace. But we must remember, that our Lord had not yet declared the whole of what he was come to reveal. This sermon was delivered quite at the commencement of his ministry, and before the minds of his followers were sufficiently prepared for the clearer manifestation of divine truth. What therefore he afterwards declared respecting the intent of his death and resurrection, must direct us in our use of this prayer. He has told us, that he “shed his blood for the remission of sins;” and that we must present our petitions to God in *his* name; consequently we must have respect to the merit of his blood, and to the efficacy of his intercession, whenever we approach our God, whether in the use of this prayer, or of any other, which we may think suited to our state. If the considerat on

^m Eph. iv. 31, 32.

ⁿ Matt. v. 23, 24. and especially xviii. 35.

^o Matt. vii. 7, 8. Isai. i. 18.

of an atonement seem to detract from the *freeness* of the pardon, St. Paul saw no ground whatever for such an objection^p.

Be it known then to all, that a way of access unto the Father is opened to us through the crucifixion of the Son of God; and that, if only we ask forgiveness in the Redeemer's name, our iniquities, whatever they may have been, shall be "blotted out as a morning cloud," and be irrecoverably "cast into the depths of the sea."]

P Rom. iii. 24.

MCCCXVII.

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

Matt. vi. 13. *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*

THE obtaining of pardon would satisfy a person who was merely alarmed by the terrors of hell: but a truly regenerate person will desire deliverance from sin as much as from hell itself. He knows that he could not be happy even in heaven, if sin retained in any respect dominion over him. Hence, having implored pardon for his past sins, he will, with equal earnestness, desire victory over his remaining corruptions. But how is this victory to be gained, seeing that we are encompassed with temptations, and assaulted by all the powers of darkness? It must be gained by committing ourselves to the care of our heavenly Father, and by seeking from him,

I. The guidance of his providence—

Continually are we endangered by the temptations that surround us—

[Temptations present themselves to us on every side. Every thing that is agreeable to our senses or flattering to our minds, has a tendency to draw us from God. Even the things which are the most innocent when moderately enjoyed, often become snares to us. Our food, our raiment, our comforts of every kind, and even our dearest relatives, are apt to engross our affections too much, and to become the objects of an idolatrous regard — — — The cares and troubles of life also are frequently sources of unbelieving anxiety, or murmuring discontent — — — Moreover, the contempt too generally

poured upon religion has not unfrequently a fatal influence on our minds, to keep us from inquiring after God at all, or from confessing him openly before an ungodly world — — —

To these temptations incalculable force is given by the corruptions of our own hearts. We are of our own selves prone to evil. The heart is ready to catch fire from every spark; and all the appetites and passions are quickly brought into activity in the service of sin. In vain does reason remonstrate with us: "the law of sin that is in our members, wars against the law of our minds, and brings us into captivity^a:" yea, even when the spiritual principle lusteth and striveth against the corruptions of the flesh, so strong is the corrupt principle within us, we cannot do the things that we would^b.]

Well therefore may we pray to be kept from their power—

[We are not to suppose that God is active in tempting us to sin: St. James expressly says, that it is our own lust, and not God, that is the occasion of sin^c. But God may in his providence give scope for the exercise of our corruptions, as he did, when he raised up Pharaoh to the throne of Egypt, and opened the Red Sea before him for the purpose of making him a more signal monument of his displeasure^d. On the other hand, he will often put an obstacle in the way of his people, so as to keep them from executing the evil suggestions of their hearts: he will plant a "hedge;" and, if that will not suffice, "he will build up a wall against them, that they may not find their former ways^e." *This he can do* in ten thousand ways, without at all infringing upon the liberty of the human will. Thus he diverted the patriarchs from destroying Joseph, and David from wreaking his vengeance upon Nabal^f.

Moreover, *he has promised to do this* in answer to our prayers. He will either make a way for us to escape from the temptations that assault us; or will moderate them, so that they may not be too powerful for us; or increase our strength, that we may be able to overcome them^g. In a word, he will "order our goings," and "direct our paths." If we were to depend on our own wisdom, we should only increase the difficulties which we designed to avoid^h: but if we make God our refuge, we shall be preserved. He has bidden us "watch and pray that we enter not into temptationⁱ;" and he will never suffer us to use these means in vain^k.]

^a Rom. vii. 23.

^b Gal. v. 17.

^c Jam. i. 13—15.

^d Rom. ix. 17.

^e Hos. ii. 6, 7.

^f 1 Sam. xxv. 32—34.

^g 1 Cor. x. 13. Isai. xli. 10.

^h Amos v. 9.

ⁱ Matt. xxvi. 41.

^k Ps. cxlii. 1—7. cxxxviii. 3. and l. 15.

But as we cannot hope to be kept from every temptation, we should also pray to God for,

II. The assistance of his grace—

Besides our in-dwelling corruptions, we have, in Satan, a great and powerful enemy—

[The words which in this and some other places are translated, “from evil,” might properly be translated, “from the evil one.” Satan is represented in Scripture as a most subtle and cruel adversary to man. He is called a serpent for his subtlety, a dragon for his fierceness, and a god for the dominion that he exercises over the children of men.

To withstand him in our own strength is impossible. He has wiles which we cannot discover, and devices which we cannot fathom. If permitted, he could destroy the holiest of men. None are out of his reach. He not only instigated a wicked Judas to betray his Master, and an hypocritical Ananias to lie unto his God, but an intrepid Peter to deny his Lord: and, if our Lord's intercession had not prevailed to secure the faith of this favoured servant, Satan would have “sifted him as wheat,” and brought him to everlasting destruction¹.]

We should therefore pray to be delivered from him also—

[God will deliver us from him, as well as from temptation. He has provided armour for us, which, if used aright, shall defend us against all his fiery darts. The head, the breast, the legs, have their several and appropriate means of protection — — — Every part is also doubly guarded by the shield of faith: and a sword of heavenly temper is put into the believer's hands^m; a sword which Satan is not able to withstand; a sword by which the Saviour himself prevailed over himⁿ, and which, though in the weakest hands, shall vanquish all the powers of hell^o. Does any one ask, How shall I get this armour? We answer, Pray to God to give it you. It is by prayer that it is obtained; by prayer it is put on; by prayer we are rendered expert in the use of it; and by prayer our heart is steeled with courage, and our arm confirmed with strength^p. The petition that is taught us in the text will answer every end; and urged with frequency and faith, will soon make us more than conquerors. Would we see the whole exemplified? Behold the instance of St. Paul: in him, the assault, defence, and victory, are all exhibited before our eyes. Satan assaulted him with the utmost violence: the Apostle instantly betook himself to prayer;

¹ Luke xxii. 31, 32.

^m Eph. vi. 11—17.

ⁿ Eph. vi. 17. with Matt. iv. 6, 7, 10. ^o Jam. iv. 7.

^p Eph. vi. 18.

and his triumph was speedy and complete : and in like manner shall " God's strength be perfected in our weakness," if only we rely on him for our deliverance : were we a thousand times weaker than we are, his grace should assuredly be sufficient for us^a.]

The petition, thus explained, is of USE,

1. For caution—

[When persons are urged to watch and pray, and to abstain from those things which are the occasions of sin, they are ready to complain that we are too strict, and that we abridge the liberties of men without necessity. But, what can be expected, if we will frequent every scene of vanity, and mix indiscriminately with all, whether godly or ungodly? What can be expected, but that we should drink into the spirit of the world, and be drawn into many sinful compliances? Does not every one find this to be the effect of associating with the world? Is not a conformity to its maxims and habits the almost necessary consequence of such conduct? Men, if on a field of battle, would not for their pleasure go and expose themselves where it was almost impossible to escape a wound; and yet, when their souls are in danger, they will venture any where for the sake of conforming to the world, or of obtaining some worthless gratification. But how can such persons offer the prayer which our Lord has taught us? Is it not a mockery to beg of God " not to lead us into temptation," when we are rushing into it daily of our own accord? Know ye then, beloved, that your practice should correspond with your prayers. Know, that to expose yourselves to sin is to tempt your God : yea, it is to tempt the devil to tempt you. If you would be preserved by God, you must " keep " yourselves, not your feet merely, but " your hearts also, and *that* with all diligence," avoiding not only sin itself, but also the means and occasions of sin.]

2. For encouragement—

[It may please God for wise and gracious ends to suffer you to be strongly tempted by the wicked one. Perhaps he may design to manifest and confirm the grace he has already given you^r; or to discover to you some hidden evil in your own heart^s; or he may design to keep you from falling into sin^t, or to make use of you for the strengthening of others by a contrasted exhibition of your own weakness and of his unbounded mercy in your recovery^u — — But, whatever be his object, and however painful your trial may be, remember, that Satan is a vanquished enemy^x; that he cannot go beyond the limits

^a 2 Cor. xii. 7—9.

^r Job i. 8.

^s 2 Chron. xxxii. 31.

^t 2 Cor. xii. 7. Mark the first and last words.

^u Luke xxii. 32.

^x John xvi. 11. Col. ii. 15.

which God has assigned him; and that your God is ever at hand to hear and answer your petitions. Were you called to contend in your own strength, your situation would be tremendous: but you are commanded to "cast your care on God, who careth for you," and to "encourage yourselves in the Lord your God." Be strong then, and fear not: "be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might:" and know that he who has taught you to look to him for guidance and protection, will "keep you from falling^y," and "bruise Satan under your feet shortly^z."

^y Jude, ver. 24.

^z Rom. xvi. 20.

MCCCXVIII.

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

Matt. vi. 13. *For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.*

ON a review of the Lord's Prayer, we cannot but be thankful that such a summary is here given us, not only because we are hereby instructed what to pray for, but are assured that, great as the petitions are, they shall all be granted, if we offer them up in faith. The conclusion of the prayer which we have now read, is not contained in St. Luke's Gospel. But we must remember, that the prayer was given to the disciples at two different times, and on different occasions: and that in the one it might be contained, though it might be omitted in the other. Doubts indeed have been suggested whether it originally formed any part of the prayer before us: but, whilst the Latin versions and fathers omit it, it is found in most of the Greek manuscripts, and is quoted by most of the Greek fathers: from whence the translators of our Bible have admitted it as a part of the sacred text; as we also may safely do on their authority. Certain it is that there is in these words a perfect correspondence with the prayer itself; and that they admirably express the feelings of a devout soul. This may be understood in a twofold view;

I. As a devout acknowledgment—

It is often called a doxology, or an ascription of

praise to God: and in this view we may observe concerning it,

1. That it accords with many other passages of Holy Writ—

[Such effusions of praise are frequent in the Holy Scriptures: indeed the very words appear to have been taken from that thanksgiving of David, which he uttered when both he and his people had been consecrating their offerings to the Lord for the building of his temple^a——— In the New Testament such doxologies abound. The Apostles frequently interrupt the thread of their argument, (if it can be called an interruption,) by breaking forth into rapturous expressions of praise and thanksgiving^b; and more frequently conclude their epistles with such tokens of grateful adoration^c. Sometimes also we find, that, after pouring out their souls before God in prayer, the Apostles address their thanksgivings to him, just in the way that we are taught to do in the prayer before us^d. The propriety therefore of addressing God in this manner is evident, since it is sanctioned by the example of the saints in all ages.]

2. That it is well calculated for the use of the Christian Church—

[Every work of God, whether animate or inanimate, renders unto him a tribute of praise: the beauty and order of the whole creation, and the adaptation of every thing to its proper end, declares aloud the wisdom, the power, and the goodness of the Creator. But the people of God must be active in rendering praise to him; according to that distinction of the Psalmist, “All thy works *praise* thee, O God; and thy saints shall *bless* thee^e.” The redeemed of the Lord are called upon to testify their obligations to him in this manner day and night^f: it is “comely” for them so to do^g, and, “if they should hold their peace, the very stones would cry out against them.” And where shall we find words more proper for our use? They are so concise as to be easily remembered, and so comprehensive as to include every thing that we could wish to say. They are, in fact, an epitome of that song which saints and angels are singing in the realms above^h——— and, if we offer them in a becoming manner, we shall have an earnest and foretaste of the heavenly bliss.

^a 1 Chron. xxix. 10—13. *Recite the passage.*

^b Gal. i. 5. 1 Tim. i. 17.

^c Rom. xvi. 27. 1 Pet. v. 11. Jude, ver. 24, 25.

^d Eph. iii. 14, 20, 21.

^e Ps. cxlv. 10.

^f Ps. cvii. 1, 2. cxlv. 1, 2. and cxlvi. 1, 2.

^g Ps. cxlvii. 1.

^h Rev. v. 13.

Nor is there a small emphasis to be laid on the word with which the prayer concludes. "Amen," when annexed to praise and thanksgiving, denotes the full concurrence of the soul in all that has been uttered. In the fourth century, it was customary for the whole Church to utter this word aloud, in order to express their cordial assent to every thing that had been spoken; and at times, as St. Jerome tells us, the sound was like thunderⁱ. As far as respects their earnestness, we approve of their custom: but we think that true devotion would be less clamorous: and we far prefer that mode adopted by the Church in the days of Nehemiah, when the earnestness was equally, but more suitably, expressed; being chastened and tempered with ardent affection and reverential awe^k — — —]

But we have observed that the words of our text may be also interpreted,

II. As an humble plea—

Pleading with God is the very essence and perfection of prayer—

[In all the more solemn addresses to the Deity recorded in the Scriptures, pleading bears a very conspicuous part. We must not however imagine that such a mode of prayer was adopted with a view to prevail upon God to grant what he was otherwise averse to give: we mistake the nature of prayer altogether, if we think that it has any such power, or is to be used for any such end. Prayer is rather intended to impress our own minds with a sense of our manifold necessities, and of our dependence upon God for a supply of them; and thus to prepare our souls for a grateful reception of the Divine favours: and consequently, the more urgent our prayers are, the more will these ends be answered; and God will be the more glorified by us, when he has imparted to us the desired benefits. It was with such views that Moses^l, Jehoshaphat^m, Hezekiahⁿ, and all the saints of old, presented their petitions, enforced and strengthened with the most urgent pleas^o. And it is impossible to feel our need of mercy, without following their example in this particular.]

As a plea, this part of the prayer admirably enforces every petition in it—

[Great are the things which we have asked in it: and utterly unworthy are we to offer such petitions at the throne of grace: but God is a mighty Sovereign, who "may do what

ⁱ "In Ecclesiis urbis Romæ quasi tonitru cœleste audimus populum reboantem Amen." Præf. in Epist. ad Galat.

^k Neh. viii. 6.

^l Exod. xxxii. 11—13.

^m 2 Chron. xx. 5—12.

ⁿ Isai. xxxvii. 15—20.

^o Isai. li. 9, 10. and lxiii. 15—19. and particularly Jer. xiv. 21, 22.

he will with his own," and therefore may hear and answer *us*, though we be the meanest and the vilest of the human race. It is this idea which we express, when we say, "*for thine is the kingdom.*" The word *FOR* shews that it has respect to what goes before, and that we urge this consideration as a plea, to enforce the preceding petitions. Next to the *sovereign right* of God to answer us, we plead his *power*. Nothing short of omnipotence can effect the things which we desire of God in this prayer: but *HE* is almighty, and all-sufficient: "with him all things are possible:" and we acknowledge our conviction, that "there is nothing too hard for him." Lastly, we plead "the *glory*" which he will derive from granting all the things which we have prayed for; in the conversion and salvation of the world at large, and in every mercy vouchsafed to ourselves in particular, whether in the supply of our bodily wants, or in the pardon of our sins and the preservation of our souls. This *sovereignty* and this *power* are his immutable perfections; and this *glory* will result to him through all eternity, even "*for ever*" and ever.

Such considerations may well animate us in our addresses at the throne of grace, and encourage us in a further confirmation of our petitions by the word "*Amen.*"

We have already mentioned one sense of the word "*Amen*;" namely, that it is a full *assent* to all that has been uttered. But it has another meaning also, and imports a *desire* that the things which have been asked may be granted^p. In this latter sense it is often doubled, in order to express more strongly the ardour of that desire^q. Would we understand its just import? we may see it illustrated in the prayer of Daniel; where, having enforced his petitions by many urgent pleas, he comes at last to renew them all with redoubled ardour; not indeed by the word "*Amen*," but in a more copious strain, expressive of the idea contained in it^r.

In the Apostolic age the use of this word was universal in the Church: whilst one person addressed the Lord in the name of the whole assembly, all who were present added their "*Amen*," and thereby made every petition and thanksgiving their own^s. Nor has the word lost its use and emphasis even in heaven: for the whole choir, both of saints and angels, are represented as using it *in both the senses that we have mentioned*; "saying, *AMEN*: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. *AMEN*^t." O that, in adding our *Amen* to the prayer before us, we might resemble *them*; and so utter it now from our inmost souls, that we may be counted worthy to utter it in full concert with them to all eternity!]

^p Rev. xxii. 20.

^q Ps. lxxii. 18, 19.

^r Dan. ix. 17—19.

^s 1 Cor. xiv. 16.

^t Rev. vii. 11, 12.

MCCCXIX.

A FORGIVING SPIRIT NECESSARY TO OUR ACCEPTANCE
WITH GOD.

Matt. vi. 14, 15. *For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

THE different petitions of the Lord's Prayer are collected from different parts of the Old Testament, and concentered so as to form a concise and comprehensive summary of all that we need to pray for. But there is annexed to one of the petitions a limitation, which was altogether new, and which greatly needed some elucidation. Our Lord however did not stop to explain it at the time, but finished the prayer first, and then added, in confirmation of it, the words which we have now read; shewing us thereby that the clause had not been lightly introduced, but was of great importance, and indispensable necessity. It certainly appeared strange, that we should presume to make our own compassion towards others the pattern and the measure of God's compassion towards us: but our Lord would have us to know, that it will be in vain to expect mercy at God's hands, unless we exercise it towards our fellow-creatures: on this condition, and on this only, can we hope for acceptance with him in the day of judgment.

Having already had repeated occasion to consider the subject of forgiveness of injuries, we shall now advert rather to the manner in which that duty is here enjoined; and shall shew,

I. In what sense the salvation of the Gospel may be called conditional—

This subject has been a fruitful source of controversy in the Church of Christ: but both sides of the question are true according to the sense which we annex to the word "condition."

Salvation is *not* conditional in a way of compact—

[There are those who think that God engages to give us heaven, if we will perform so many good works; and that, when we have performed those good works, we may claim heaven as a

debt. But to affirm that salvation is conditional in any such sense as this, would entirely make void the Gospel of Christ. Salvation would then be of works, and not of grace. It would be to no purpose to say, that these terms were procured for us by Jesus Christ, and that we must therefore refer the honour of our salvation unto him, and accept our reward as the purchase of his blood: for, though the *procuring* of the terms might be *his* act, the *performing* of them must be *ours*: and when we had performed them, we should have whereof to glory before God. But by the Gospel all glorying is excluded^a: and therefore salvation cannot be conditional in the way that we are now speaking of.]

But salvation is conditional in a way of inseparable connexion—

[“ God has chosen men to salvation;” but it is “ through sanctification of the Spirit, and through belief of the truth^b.” Faith and holiness are required of us; but the performance of them gives us a claim upon God only so far as he has freely engaged himself by his own gracious promises: it does not warrant us to expect any thing on the ground of *merit*: we cannot go to God, as labourers that have performed their task, and say, “ Pay me that thou owest:” on the contrary, “ if we had done all that was commanded us, we should still account ourselves unprofitable servants;” and must accept life as the free gift of God for Christ’s sake^c. But still we must do these things; and without doing them we cannot possibly be saved. God has appointed the means as well as the end; and the end is to be attained only in and by the means. It is certainly true that “ the purpose of God according to election shall stand^d;” but it is no less true, that it shall be effected only in the way that he has appointed; and that, whatever men may fancy about their predestination to eternal life, “ except they repent they shall all perish;” and “ if they believe not, they shall not see life;” and “ without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” In this sense therefore salvation is conditional: the obligations that are upon us are indispensable; and no person whatever shall be saved who disregards them.]

The import of the term condition being fixed, we shall proceed to shew,

II. The reasonableness of the condition here imposed—

Here it will be proper to mark the precise nature and limits of the condition imposed—

[The forgiving of others is not so to be understood as to supersede the exercise of *magisterial authority*. God has

^a Rom. iii. 27. ^b 2 Thess. ii. 13. ^c Rom. vi. 23. ^d Rom. ix. 11.

appointed magistrates as his vicegerents in the world, and has put the sword into their hands "for the punishment of evil-doers, and the support of them that do well:" and if they should forbear "to execute wrath" upon those who violate the laws, they would themselves be guilty of a dereliction of their public duty. Such lenity therefore is not comprehended in the duty which is here inculcated. Neither does the duty here spoken of altogether prohibit us from the *personal exercise of our just rights*, either for self-defence, or for the obtaining of legal redress. The Apostle Paul pleaded his right as a Roman citizen in order to protect himself against the injuries with which he was menaced; and appealed to the tribunal of Cæsar to obtain that justice which was denied him in the inferior courts. He has indeed expressed his disapprobation of a litigious spirit, and especially such a shameful exercise of it as led Christians to drag one another before the tribunals of Heathens. But he does not prohibit Christians from submitting their claims to the arbitration of judicious persons among themselves; and consequently he does not require us so to forgive those who injure us, as *in no case* to seek redress. If the only alternative be to suffer an injury, or by angry contention to embroil ourselves in difficulties and quarrels, our Lord has determined the point for us, and bidden us to "turn the other cheek to a man who has smitten us," rather than retaliate the injury, or do ourselves a still greater injury by yielding to a vindictive spirit. But to a certain extent, the support of our just rights is necessary for the preservation of the peace of the community; and consequently we not only are *permitted*, but *bound*, in some instances, to maintain our rights, and to punish those who would rob us of them.

But nothing is ever to be done from a vindictive spirit. The smallest disposition to revenge is strictly prohibited. We not only must not avenge ourselves, but must not for a moment be pleased with the news that any evil has happened even to our most inveterate enemy. So far from wishing him evil, we ought to the uttermost to do him good: to love and bless him when he hates and curses us; and to pray fervently to God for him, at the very time he is doing us all the injury in his power. The work of retribution must be left to God, "to whom alone vengeance belongeth;" and we must content ourselves with "heaping coals of fire upon his head," to melt him into love.

Now on our performance of this duty God suspends the salvation of our souls.]

The reasonableness of this condition will easily appear—

[If we exercise this grace of forgiveness from proper motives, and in a becoming manner, it will be a clear evidence

that we are renewed in the spirit of our minds. There are, it is true, some persons of so easy and gentle a disposition, that they would rather pass by an offence than be at the trouble to resent it. But the forgiving spirit of which we are speaking must proceed from a sense of our own utter unworthiness, and of the exceeding greatness of that debt which has been forgiven us. It must proceed also from a sense of love and gratitude to our Lord and Saviour, and from a desire to honour him by treading in his steps and "walking as he walked." Now where such principles and such conduct are found, there will every other grace be found also: there is in an eminent degree the image of God enstamped upon the soul; and there is "a meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light." It is reasonable therefore that such a person, possessed of such humility, such faith, such love, such patience, such self-denial, and such an obediential frame, should be forgiven by his God. There is a perfect correspondence between his work and his reward.

On the contrary, a person of an unforgiving spirit shews, beyond a doubt, that he is altogether unhumbled for his own sins. If he had a proper consciousness of the guilt which he himself has contracted, he would feel no disposition to cast a stone at others: nor would he take a fellow-servant by the throat for a few pence, when he was sensible how many talents he himself owed unto his God. Who, that reads the parable by which our Lord has illustrated this subject, does not see the equity of the sentence passed upon the unforgiving servant^e? So must also that universal sentence be accounted reasonable by every dispassionate man, "He shall have judgment without mercy, who hath shewed no mercy^f."

On whichever side then we view the condition, it appears most reasonable: it is most reasonable that the forgiving should be pardoned, and the unforgiving punished: and knowing as we do, the determination of God to act agreeably to this rule, we must prepare to expect our sentence of condemnation or acquittal according to it.]

From this one subject we may obtain a deep insight into Christianity: we may BEHOLD,

1. Its consistency—

[Persons from different motives are apt to represent the declarations of God in his word as at variance with each other; and, according to their respective views, to wrest the meaning of them for the purpose of maintaining their own particular system. Some, because the grace of God is freely proclaimed

^e Matt. xviii. 23—35.

^f Jam. ii. 13.

to sinners, will not endure the mention of a condition, or admit that there is any kind of conditionality in such passages as that before us. Others, because of such passages, will not endure to hear of God's electing grace, which they suppose to be inconsistent with them. Others again, because of the difficulty of reducing every thing to their comprehension, are ready to reject Christianity as altogether inconsistent with itself. But there are no two positions in the whole book of God, which are inconsistent with each other. That there are difficulties, we admit: but so there are also in every other work of God, whether of creation or providence: and if there were none in the work of redemption, we should have reason to think that it was not really of divine original. No man that ever lived could reconcile the existence of sin with the holiness of God: but is there therefore an absolute inconsistency between them? Does not every one see that the inability to reconcile them arises from the weakness of our intellect and the narrow limits of our knowledge? The same difficulty is complained of by some in reference to the subject before us; but it is obvious, from the statement we have made, that enough may be said to satisfy an humble mind, though there may still be difficulties left for the confounding of a proud spirit. This is really the case with respect to every other doctrine in the Bible: there may be, as in some works of human art, wheels moving in a variety of directions, and appearing to an ignorant person to obstruct each other; but there is an unity in the whole design, and a subserviency in every part to the production of one common end.

Let us then be on our guard against that controversial spirit that leads men to wrest or stumble at the word of God: and, if there be difficulties which we cannot reconcile, let us be content to say, "What I know not now, I shall know hereafter."]

2. Its equity—

[It is astonishing to hear with what presumption many will arraign the justice of God: 'If he has not elected me, how can I help myself? If he imposes on me conditions which I cannot perform, with what equity will he condemn me?' The Apostle's answer to such proud objectors is that which most befits their state: "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" Yet the subject before us may suffice to shew, that "God will be justified in his sayings, and be clear when he judgeth:" the day of judgment is called "the revelation of the righteous judgment of God;" and such it will appear to all. Those who now quarrel with the deep doctrines of predestination and election, will then find, that God has ordered every thing in perfect wisdom and equity. None will then presume to arraign his counsels. None will then object

that any are saved or condemned contrary to strict justice. Not one ungodly person will be found amongst those that are saved, nor one godly person amongst those that perish. Both the forgiving and unforgiving will have judgment “measured to them, according as they have meted unto others;” and every man’s happiness or misery will be exactly apportioned to him, according to his works. The godly indeed will feel no difficulty in ascribing their salvation to God and to the Lamb; but the ungodly must for ever ascribe their condemnation to their own incorrigible folly and wickedness.]

3. Its excellency—

[The evils which Christianity is intended to remedy, are guilt and wickedness: and these it does remedy most effectually. Forgiveness of sins is freely offered to every penitent believer, without any respect to the number or greatness of his offences: “the blood of Jesus Christ shall cleanse him from all sin:” if only the sinner believe in Jesus, “he shall be justified from all things,” without exception. But does Christianity make no provision for holiness? Does it leave men a prey to evil dispositions, and a torment to each other? No: it requires a change both of heart and life: it requires the exercise of universal love: it requires a conformity to God himself: it saves not one single person, whom it does not first of all change into the image of God, and make “perfect as God himself is perfect.” Were Christianity universally prevalent, and if it had its full operation in every heart, there would be no unkindness in men towards each other, nor any trouble in their own minds. O that its influence were more generally known, and more deeply felt! Let those at least who profess to have embraced it in sincerity and truth, shew forth its power. Let them shew what amiable tempers it produces in the mind, and what a lovely carriage it produces in the life. If at any time they receive an injury, instead of meditating revenge, let them say, ‘Now has my God given me an opportunity of recommending religion, and of glorifying his name: now has he called me to display the excellency of his Gospel and the efficacy of his grace.’ Such conduct would serve as an evidence to our own minds that we are the Lord’s, and would constrain others also to acknowledge that God is with us of a truth.]

MCCCXX.

DIRECTIONS RESPECTING FASTING.

Matt. vi. 16—18. *Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto*

you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

IN temporal concerns, men rarely, if ever, confound the means with the end: they expect not the end, but in the use of the means; nor do they use the means, but in reference to the end: they put both in their proper place, subordinating the one to the other; and using the one in order to the other. But in religion, nothing is more common than either to separate or confound them: to separate, by expecting the end without the means; or to confound them, by resting in the means, as if they were the end. For instance: God has appointed fasting as the means of advancing our souls in holiness; but whilst some expect to attain holiness without any such self-denying exertions, others rest in the duty itself, and make that their righteousness. Of the former description are the generality of Christians at this day: of the latter were the Pharisees of old, against whose errors our Lord is guarding his disciples throughout the whole of this sermon on the mount. In the foregoing chapter he has rectified our views in relation to sin: he now rectifies them in relation to duty.

In considering the words before us, we shall notice,
I. What is implied in them—

It is obvious, that, whilst our Lord gives us directions *how* to fast, he intimates,

1. That fasting is a duty—

[Of this there can be no doubt. Some indeed have thought, that the only fast required of us was to abstain from the commission of sin: but, by the same mode of interpreting other parts of this chapter, they will set aside prayer and almsgiving; both of which are required here, not by a positive precept, but by implication only, precisely as fasting is required in the text.

Under the Jewish economy there was an annual fast, which all were bound to observe with great strictness, namely, that on the great day of atonement^a. On particular occasions other

^a Lev. xxiii. 26—31.

fasts were instituted: by Joshua, when some of his men had been slain by the men of Ai^b: by the eleven tribes of Israel, when in two successive conflicts they had been defeated with great slaughter by the tribe of Benjamin^c. Besides other public fasts ordered by those in authority, we find the most eminent of God's servants observing fasts in private. David, as well on account of the unhappy state of his enemies, as on account of his own personal afflictions, "wept and chastened his soul with fasting^d:" and Daniel, desirous of knowing the time which God had fixed for the deliverance of his people from Babylon, sought the Lord, not in prayer only, but "with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes^e." These things, though observed under the law, shew that fasting was not a mere legal ordinance, which in due time was to be disannulled; but a mode of worship suited to the necessities of our fallen nature, and acceptable to God at all times. Indeed, the heathens themselves saw the propriety of approaching God in this manner; insomuch that the governors of Nineveh, when threatened with the divine judgments, proclaimed a fast, and caused it to be strictly observed, not by the people only, but even by the beasts themselves^f.]

2. That all his followers would be observant of it—

[This he takes for granted: for why should he give them directions respecting an ordinance which he did not intend them to observe, and which he knew they would not observe? It is manifest that he expected his people to fast, as well as to give alms and pray; and indeed, on another occasion, he declared they *should* fast. During his presence with them, it would not have been expedient for him to require it, (because his disciples were not yet prepared for such austerities;) nor would it have been suited to their state and condition, (because it was rather a season proper for holy joy:) but after his removal from them, there would be abundant occasion for such self-denying duties; and his disciples would be strengthened for the performance of them^g. Accordingly we find that they were "in fastings often," and that they rarely addressed themselves to any extraordinary duty, such as that of ordaining elders, or separating persons to the work of the ministry, without having first implored direction from God in fasting and prayer^h.]

Having shewn that there is a duty implied in the text, we proceed to consider,

II. What is expressed—

^b Josh. vii. 6.

^d Ps. xxxv. 13. 2 Sam. xii. 16.

^f Jonah iii. 6—8.

^h Acts xiii. 2, 3. and xiv. 23.

^c Judg. xx. 26.

^e Dan. ix. 3.

^g Matt. ix. 14—17.

Here are directions given for the due performance of this duty. It should be performed,

1. Unostentatiously—

[Religion, of a certain kind at least, was in high repute among the Jews: and consequently there was a great temptation to assume an appearance of piety amongst them. Hence the Pharisees observed frequent fast-days, (generally “twice in the week,”) and studiously endeavoured to attract the attention of others by their squalid appearance. They omitted to cleanse and anoint themselves, as at other times; and “disfigured their faces,” probably by dust and ashes which they had strewed on their heads, or, at all events, by downcast and gloomy looks.

Similar temptations do not occur to *us*: the habits of modern times are not such as to render that kind of sanctity an object of applause: it would rather be thought an indication of insanity: and therefore hypocrisy is rarely seen amongst us in that garb. Nevertheless, the caution against an ostentatious display of piety is at no time unseasonable. Diversity of customs, however they may produce a change in the modes of shewing hypocrisy, make no change at all in the dispositions of the heart: and therefore we must understand this caution as extending to every thing whereby our religious exercises may be ostentatiously displayed.]

2. Sincerely—

[As on the one hand, we are not to desire to be seen of men, so on the other hand, we should act as in the presence of the all-seeing God. But here we fail. In seasons of great public calamity, our government has always called us to humble ourselves before God: and the words which we have uttered at such times have been well suited to the occasion. But how little of real repentance has God seen amongst us! The true way to keep a fast unto the Lord, is by deep humiliation of our souls, and a resolute amendment of our lives. The former is inculcated by the Prophet Joelⁱ, — — — the latter by the Prophet Isaiah^k — — — But in how few instances have our professions been realized! Well may God complain of us, as of his people of old, “When ye did fast, did ye fast unto *me*, even unto *me*?” Truly, *in sincerity of heart* we have been as deficient as ever the Pharisees of old were: and the only difference between them and us has been, that they had the appearance of piety without the reality, and we have been equally destitute of both: we have, with the exception of uttering a few words in a place of worship, rejected even the form of that duty,

ⁱ Joel ii. 12, 13.

^k Isai. lviii. 5—7.

^l Zech. vii. 5, 6.

which we ought to have observed in deed and in truth. But “God is not deceived; nor will he be mocked:” if we thus pour contempt on him and his ordinances, he will require it at our hands at the last day. Let us then, on every renewed occasion, endeavour so to approve ourselves to God, that “he who seeth in secret may reward us openly.”]

In the review of this subject, we may LEARN,

1. Whence it is that religion is at such a low ebb amongst us—

[Many are convinced of their lost estate, and live miserably under a sense of guilt, without ever obtaining either pardon of their sins, or victory over them. The reason is precisely that which is stated by our Lord himself: “they *seek* to enter in at the strait gate, but are not able, because they do not *strive*.” They do not rise to the occasion: if a few wishes would be effectual, they would soon become new creatures: but if days of fasting and humiliation be found requisite, they will not submit to such a task: they will rather lose heaven, than be at so much cost to obtain it. They find by experience, that what our Lord said respecting some evil spirits whom his disciples could not cast out, is true respecting some of their deep-rooted lusts and habits: “That kind goeth not forth, but by prayer and fasting:” but, as they will not use the means of deliverance, God leaves them still in bondage; and “they are led captive by the devil at his will.”]

The want of proficiency in many religious people must be traced to the same source: they do not aspire after high degrees of piety; they are satisfied with low attainments, and with scanty measures of peace and joy. What might they not attain, if they would even learn of a heathen centurion to abound in fasting and prayer^m! How much happier too, as well as holier, would married persons be, if they were occasionally to practise those habits which obtained frequently in the primitive Churchⁿ! Let it be remembered by us, that they who will build high, must dig deep; and, that the more we are abased in humiliation and contrition, the more shall we be exalted in peace and joy.]

2. Whence it is that our nation is still under the afflicting hand of God^o—

[To those who would shew true patriotism, we would

^m Acts x. 30.

ⁿ 1 Cor. vii. 5.

^o This was preached in 1810, when war had continued almost twenty years, and we had disregarded as many calls to public humiliation; or rather had made them so many occasions of increasing and aggravating our guilt.

recommend the example of Nehemiah^p; confident that such intercessors are the real bulwark of the nation — — — If the humiliation of so wicked a prince as Ahab succeeded so far as to defer the judgments of God to the next generation, we may well hope, that the genuine repentance of many would prevail for the entire removal of them from our land. “As long as we continued to seek the Lord, the Lord would make us to prosper.”]

^p Neh. i. 4.

MCCCXXI.

LAYING UP TREASURES IN HEAVEN.

Matt. vi. 19—21. *Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

MUCH of our Lord's sermon on the mount was intended to explain the true import of the Law, in opposition to the false glosses with which the Scribes and Pharisees had obscured it. But in many parts of it the instruction is general, and unconnected with any particular persons or circumstances. The Pharisees indeed were covetous: but the whole human race are more intent on earthly than on heavenly things; and therefore the exhortation in our text may be considered as equally important in every age and place.

In discoursing upon it, we shall consider,

I. The direction given—

This consists of two parts, the one negative, the other positive:

1. The negative part—

[This is not to be understood as though there were no situation or circumstances wherein it were allowable to lay up money: for it is certainly the duty of all persons to make provision for those whose subsistence depends upon them: those who should refuse to support their aged parents or relatives would be deemed worse than infidels^a: nor, by parity of

^a 1 Tim. v. 8.

reasoning, can they be considered as acting more suitably to their Christian profession who neglect to make a necessary provision for their children^b. But we may gather from the very terms in which the direction is expressed, what are the limitations with which it is to be understood. The *measure*, the *manner*, the *end*, are all clearly defined. We are not to lay up “treasures.” What is necessary for the carrying on of our trade, or for the supporting of ourselves in old age, or for the enabling of our family to maintain that rank of life wherein they have been educated, may be considered as allowable: but what is laid up for the sake of enriching and aggrandizing our family, may be justly included in the prohibition before us. Of course, no precise sum can be fixed; because what would be wealth to one man, would be poverty to another: but whatever argues discontent, and a desire of elevating ourselves and our families above the rank which Providence has allotted us in life, should be regarded with a jealous eye and a trembling heart. The “*treasuring up* treasures,” as the original term imports, may not unfitly represent to us that kind of solicitude which our Lord forbids. Though it is a mode of expression quite common in the Greek, yet it conveys an idea of eagerness and covetousness which are altogether contrary to the Christian character. Christianity does not require a man to cast away, or even to give away, his paternal inheritance, or all the fruits of his own labour: but it absolutely forbids him to find delight in treasuring up his wealth, or in looking to it as a source either of safety or happiness. The laying up of treasures “*for ourselves*” is also particularly forbidden: and in this view there is little difference, whether we have respect to our own personal comfort, or the comfort of our children, who are, in fact, a part of ourselves. The saying, “Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years,” argues a sordid and earthly mind; and renders us peculiarly obnoxious to the Divine displeasure.

Thus the prohibitory part of this direction must be taken somewhat in a qualified sense, as it respects the *act*: though it is altogether unqualified, as it respects the *habit* of our minds.]

2. The positive part—

[Here there is not the same necessity for assigning any limits to the expression, or for guarding persons against excess in their endeavours to follow the Divine command. Here the *measure*, the *manner*, the *end* of our desires should accord with the full import of the words themselves. What we lay up in heaven should be considered as our richest “*treasure* :” and we should “*treasure it up*” with insatiable avidity. We should lay it up also with an especial view to “*ourselves*.” What we

^b 2 Cor. xii. 14.

now possess we should dispose of for the good of others; but what we lay up in heaven can be enjoyed by ourselves only; and should be regarded by us as the only portion deserving our pursuit.

This then is the direction which we are to follow: and herein we may well take for our guides those persons who go abroad for the acquisition of wealth. They go thither for one fixed purpose, which they follow uniformly during their continuance there. They never for a moment forget that they are labouring with a view to their future happiness in their native country. They never suffer a year to pass without inquiring how far they have succeeded in expediting or securing the great object before them. They lose no opportunity of remitting home the produce of their labour: and they feel increasing satisfaction in proportion as the time approaches for the termination of their present exertions, and the complete fruition of their long-wished-for enjoyments. So should it be with *us*. We should follow our present occupations as subservient to future happiness: we should account every day lost which has not added somewhat to our store, and laid a foundation for eternal bliss. We should make our remittances from time to time, depositing to the utmost of our power in the bank of heaven; and should consider ourselves as rich, not in proportion to what we spend at present, but rather in proportion to what we can lay up for future enjoyment.]

Let us now turn our attention to,

II. The reasons with which it is enforced—

These are taken from different sources:

1. From the comparative value of the different kinds of treasure—

[Earthly treasure, of whatever kind it be, is perishable in its nature, and uncertain in its duration: whereas heavenly treasure is incorruptible, and eternal. The wealth of the ancients consisted much in the number of their superb garments, which “moths” might easily destroy. Even their precious metals might at last be consumed by “rust” and canker; and at all events they might be taken away by deceit or violence. The uncertainty of earthly possessions was never more manifest than in the present age. But if we be rich in faith and in good works, if we have laid up treasures of that kind in heaven, what shall ever lessen their value, or who shall ever rob us of the enjoyment of them? “No moth or rust shall ever corrupt them; no thief shall ever break through to steal them.”

Say then, Whether this be not reason sufficient for laying up treasures in heaven, rather than on earth? Even if we could realize all our expectations with respect to this world, our

happiness must be short, because life itself is coming speedily to a close: but there is not a human being who does not feel the insufficiency of earthly things to make him happy: What then can they contribute to our happiness in that day, when nothing of them shall remain, except the fearful responsibility for having idolized and abused them, and the tremendous judgments of God for having suffered them to alienate our minds from him? But the very exercise of grace is happiness, independent of the reward which it will receive in glory; and the more we abound in good works now, the happier shall we be to all eternity; for "every one shall receive according to his own labour."]

2. From their uniform influence upon the heart—

[Whatever our treasure be, it will occupy the supreme place in our affections, and engage in its service the noblest powers of our souls. But is such regard due to any *earthly* thing? Does not *God* claim our heart as his throne, on which he is to reign without a rival? Has he not required us to "love HIM with *all* our heart, and *all* our mind, and *all* our soul, and *all* our strength?" If then we make any thing else our treasure, we rob him of his honour, and cast him down from his throne. And will he not fearfully resent such conduct? Will he not say, "Bring hither those that were mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me?" Surely this consideration may well instruct us in the path we are to pursue: it proclaims loudly to us, "Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth." If, indeed, God would be contented with a divided heart, we might be less scrupulous about the objects of our pursuit: but as "he is a jealous God," and "will not give his glory to another," it becomes us to live in this world "as pilgrims and sojourners," and to direct all our efforts towards the attainment of his favour and his inheritance.]

This SUBJECT affords abundant occasion,

1. For reproof—

[Would one not suppose, from the conduct of the world at large, that our Lord's instructions had been the very reverse of what they are? If he had bidden us lay up treasures on earth, and not in heaven, he had found us a very obedient people. But his command is plain; and it is at the peril of our souls to disobey it. True it is, that a compliance with it is deemed folly; and an habitual violation of it is accounted wisdom^c: but "God seeth not as man seeth:" his judgment respecting this is the very reverse of theirs^d: and by that shall our doom be regulated in the eternal world — — —

^c Ps. xlix. 18.

^d Luke xii. 20.

Think not that we mean to decry industry; for diligence in earthly pursuits is recommended and enjoined by God himself^e: but it is the regarding of earthly things as the sources of our happiness that is condemned in the text: and if we will make them our treasure, they are the only treasure which we shall ever possess — — —]

2. For encouragement—

[If it were necessary to lay up treasures on earth, you might well be discouraged. One might say, I have not abilities for it: another, I have no capital to trade with: another, There are too many competitors in my line of business: another, I have been robbed and impoverished by a treacherous partner, or a dishonest debtor. But no such grounds of discouragement exist in relation to heavenly treasures. The wisest philosopher has no advantage over the most illiterate peasant: there is equal access afforded to every one to the inexhaustible riches of Christ, by the improvement of which alone any one can be made “rich towards God:” competitors for heavenly wealth promote, instead of impeding, each other’s success: nor shall either deceit or violence ever prevail against those who commit their cause to God. Let all of us then unite in this glorious work: let us be satisfied with no attainments; but “covet earnestly the best gifts:” let us be ever “pressing forward, forgetting what is behind, and reaching forth to that which is before.” Whatever we have of this world’s goods, let us lay them out for the Lord with prudent generosity: let us “lend” them to him, and he will repay us again. But if we are poor in this world, let us honour the Lord by cheerful contentment; assured that every grace we exercise, whether passive or active, shall be richly “recompensed at the resurrection of the just.”]

^e Rom. xii. 11. Eccl. ix. 10.

MCCCXXII.

THE SINGLE EYE.

Matt. vi. 22, 23. *The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!*

REASON is certainly the richest endowment of the human mind. When regulated by the word and Spirit of God, it will direct our paths, and enable us to guard against every dangerous or important error;

but it is capable of being so warped by specious reasonings, and selfish considerations, as to become an engine of Satan, and an instrument of our more aggravated ruin: there is nothing, however unreasonable, which a perverse spirit will not do; nor any thing, however criminal, which it will not justify. Hence our blessed Lord, in the passage before us, inculcated on his followers the necessity of having “a single eye,” and of acting on all occasions with a well-informed and upright intention.

Let us consider,

I. The instruction here given us—

There is “a light within us,” which is to the soul what the natural eye is to the body; and, if preserved in healthful exercise, will serve, in most instances, to direct our steps: but if it be vitiated and obscured by the film of vile affections, it will itself become as darkness.

But it may be asked, Can reason or conscience ever be so perverted as to become darkness? I answer, Yes: and this is actually the case,

1. When, though it does shine, we will not follow its direction—

[The eye, supposing it to be free from any defects, is capable of directing all the motions of the body. So reason or conscience, if freed from all undue bias, will serve in a great measure to regulate the active powers of the soul^a. But as a person who should keep his eyes shut in order that he might not behold the light, would be in the same predicament with one who was really blind; so the person, who either will not bring his reason and conscience to the light of God’s word, or obstinately determines to persist in the paths of error, is, in effect at least, as much in darkness, as if he did not possess any such faculties—]

2. When it is obscured by any defect in the organs of vision—

[As vicious humours will destroy the sight of our bodily eyes, so will sinful affections impair the powers of the mind. Prejudice, passion, or interest, will often blind us to such a degree, that we cannot discern the things that are most obvious

^a Prov. xx. 27.

to others. We all are sensible of this weakness in others; and it would be well if we were more on our guard respecting it in ourselves. Not to mention the innumerable instances which manifest themselves in our conduct towards each other, how universally are men blinded in their conduct towards God! While Christianity *in general*, is allowed to be both good and necessary, there is scarcely any regard paid to its *particular*, and most distinguishing tenets. Its fundamental doctrines, such as original sin, justification by faith, regeneration by the Holy Spirit, are discarded as erroneous; and its most essential precepts of holiness and self-denial are ridiculed as preciseness and enthusiasm. Where the jaundiced eye receives such an impression respecting the most important truths, its light must be considered as no better than darkness—]

3. When under a professed regard to it, we do what is in itself evil—

[It is no uncommon thing to put “evil for good, and darkness for light,” and to engage earnestly in some evil conduct under the idea that we are doing what is right^b. Our Lord has taught us to expect that men would persecute and even “kill his faithful followers, and imagine all the time that they were doing God service.” And Paul, in the midst of all his boasted morality, persecuted the Christians even unto death, and persuaded himself that “he ought to do” so^c. A similar conduct yet obtains in the world. There are thousands who yet think it their duty to oppose the progress of the Gospel, and to repress by every means in their power its influence over their friends and relatives. The light of such persons surely is, not only dark, but darkness itself—]

It appears then, that *our Lord cautions us not to neglect or violate the dictates of our conscience*. And to impress this lesson more deeply on our minds, I will mark,

II. The vast importance of it to every child of man—

The Jews had manifested a most astonishing perverseness in resisting all the evidences of our Lord’s mission; and he well knew how fatal it would prove to them, if they should persist in it any longer. Hence he gave them this solemn caution, which may, for similar reasons, be given also unto us,

1. The evil against which we are guarded, is a common evil—

^b Isai. v. 20.

^c John xvi. 2. Acts xxvi. 9.

[Though there is much ignorance in the world, yet there are few, if any, whose practice does not fall very far short of what they know to be their duty. There certainly are different degrees of light in the minds of unconverted men; but all in some measure “resist the truth,” and “imprison it in unrighteousness^d.” When therefore this evil is so general, should we not be on our guard against it? When all of us see how much it prevails in others, should we not suspect its influence over ourselves? Let every one tremble for his own house, when he sees it standing in the midst of a general conflagration—]

2. It is an evil to which we are prone—

[The heart is justly said to be “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” It is ready and ingenious in colouring over its own devices, and in justifying whatever tends to its own satisfaction. The world also presents to us ten thousand pleas that serve to confirm our delusions. And Satan, who beguiled our first parents in Paradise, doubtless lends his aid to lead us astray, and to keep us ignorant of our real state. Who is there amongst us that has not experienced this proneness to self-deception? The very Apostles on some occasions “knew not what spirit they were of.” And who has not repeatedly found, that the things, which seemed right in his eyes at one time, have, in an hour of sober reflection, appeared to have been the extremest folly? Surely then we never can be too watchful against the treachery of our own hearts—]

3. It is an evil that greatly aggravates our guilt—

[God has given us a conscience capable of “accusing or excusing” us according to the true tenour of our actions^e. Now if we either warp it by vile affections, or silence it by continued opposition to its dictates, our sin is aggravated a hundred-fold. This is repeatedly declared both by Christ and his Apostles^f. And can we suppose that our punishment also will not be proportionably enhanced? Will not “the servant who knew his Lord’s will and did it not, be beaten with more stripes than he who transgressed through ignorance?” Will not those, who improved a less degree of light, “rise up in judgment against” those who enjoyed more ample means of instruction, and yet neglected to improve them? No doubt, it were “better never to have known the will of God at all, than, having known it,” to live in an allowed opposition to it—]

^d Rom. i. 18. *κατεχόντων*. A heathen felt this: “Video meliora, proboque; deteriora sequor.”

^e Rom. ii. 15.

^f Jam. iv. 17. John xv. 22. and ix. 41. and iii. 19—21.

4. It is an evil that involves us in the greatest danger—

[If we will not receive the truth in the love of it, we have reason to fear that God will give us up to our own delusions, that we may believe a lie, and receive the condemnation due to our perverseness^g. He sometimes suffers the light itself to have no other effect than to blind our eyes^h. And what a tremendous judgment would that be! We should only wander further and further from God, till we had “filled up the measure of our iniquities,” and be thus “treasuring up for ourselves wrath against the day of wrath.” Should we ever be left to this state, “better were it for us that we had never been born.”]

Having thus explained the reasons of this caution, we shall conclude with a few words of ADVICE—

1. Get your conscience truly enlightened—

[It needs the illumination of God's word and Spirit. Without *that* it will be but a blind guide at best. God however has promised, for the comfort of those who seek him, that “The meek he will guide in judgment, the meek he will teach his way.”]

2. Regard the dictates of conscience in *little* things—

[Conscience must maintain an uncontrolled, unlimited sway. You must “exercise yourself daily to keep it void of offence towards God and man.” If you violate its dictates in small things, you will soon cease to reverence it in greater matters. But listen to its voice on *all* occasions, and it will never suffer you to err materially. There shall always be a voice behind you, saying, “This is the way, walk ye in itⁱ.”]

3. Guard against worldly and carnal lusts—

[It is astonishing to what a degree even the most sensible men, as David and Solomon, may be blinded by “foolish and hurtful lusts.” The love of money, of pleasure, or of honour, alas! how will they warp the judgment, how will they divert us from the path of duty! Love not the world if you have any wish to possess the love of God. The two attachments are inconsistent and incompatible with each other^k.]

4. Set the Lord Jesus ever before you—

[He is the light of the world; and if you will follow him, you shall never walk in darkness^l. If you can find what Christ would have done in your situation, do *that* resolutely and universally.]

^g 2 Thess. ii. 11, 12.

^h Isai. vi. 9, 10.

ⁱ Isai. xxx. 21.

^k 1 John ii. 15.

^l John viii. 12.

MCCCXXIII.

THE SERVICES OF GOD AND MAMMON INCONSISTENT.

Matt. vi. 24. *No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.*

THE dictates of pure and undefiled religion are so remote from the apprehension of the natural man, and so contrary to his inclinations, that they need to be presented to him with the clearest evidence, and most convincing energy. Hence our blessed Lord continually illustrated his doctrines by images taken from common life, or by truths universally known and acknowledged. The irreconcilableness of the service of God with the service of Mammon is very little considered: the world in general have no idea of it: but the impossibility of being wholly at the disposal of two earthly masters is obvious enough; because, when their commands interfere with each other, the servant, in obeying one, must disobey the other; and in cleaving to one, must, virtually, renounce the other. This being acknowledged, we are prepared to confess the same in relation to God and Mammon. It is thus that our Lord introduces and confirms the aphorism before us: in discoursing upon which, we shall shew,

I. The import of our Lord's assertion—

“Mammon” is a Syriac word, signifying *riches*; and it is the great idol to which all the world are bowing down. But as wealth is principally sought for on account of its connexion with pleasures and honour, we need not confine ourselves to the precise idea of riches; but consider Mammon as signifying *the world* with all its poor vanities, of whatever kind they be.

But what are we to understand by “*serving*” God and Mammon? Here is the difficulty; and this is a point that must be determined with much caution and judgment. When our Lord says, “Ye cannot *serve* God and Mammon,”

He does not mean that we cannot render them *any* services—

[This is not the case even with earthly masters: for we may serve two or three masters, provided they be contented with services that are *partial, subordinate, or successive*——— And in such a manner as this, we may serve both God and Mammon.]

He does not mean that we cannot render them the services which are *their due*—

[If only we clearly ascertain what services are *due* to each, we shall find that they are not at all incompatible with each other. Those who are averse to perform their duties to God, are very apt to represent them as inconsistent with the duties of relative and social life. But this is without any just foundation. It would be strange indeed if the duties of the two tables opposed each other: on the contrary, we cannot truly perform the one without performing the other also: in serving God, we shall serve the world; and in serving the world, we shall serve our God.]

His meaning is, that we cannot render them the services which *they require*—

[God requires that we should love and serve him with *all* our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength. He requires, that every thing bad shall be renounced for him; every thing indifferent be subordinated to him; and every thing good be done with a direct reference to his will as the rule, and his glory as the end.

The world, on the contrary, prescribes laws and maxims for our conduct which God has never prescribed, yea, which he has expressly forbidden. And it is in this contrariety of the one to the other, that we must look for the fuller explanation of the words before us.]

Let us then proceed to state, in reference to this assertion,

II. The grounds and reasons of it—

If it be asked, Why can we not serve both God and Mammon? we answer, Because,

1. Their interests are different—

[God has a cause which is exceeding dear to him; a cause which occupied his mind from all eternity, and for the promotion of which he has given his only-begotten Son to die for us, and his blessed Spirit to instruct us. The interest he pursues, is the reign of Christ on earth, and the establishment

of his kingdom throughout the world^a. He longs to bring down heaven upon earth, that men may be, as nearly as possible, in a paradisiacal state, and in a constant meetness for glory^b.

The world knows nothing of such an interest as this: it proposes nothing of the kind: on the contrary, to please and gratify the carnal mind is the one scope of all its plans. In pursuit of this it labours to draw away its votaries from the consideration of heavenly things, and to fix their attention upon the things of time and sense.

What prospect have we then of rendering acceptable service to those whose interests are so widely different?]

2. Their commands are contrary—

[God commands us to “make our light shine before men:” he tells us “not to be conformed to this world,” but to “come out from it,” and to be “crucified to it through the cross of Christ;” and not only to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather to reprove them.”

Against all this the world sets its face. It does not approve that we should serve God even in secret: but that we should trouble others with our light, this is insufferable. How peremptory it is in its commands respecting this, may be seen in every age, from the time of Cain to this present moment^c.

Now how is it possible that we should render obedience to both these masters? The one says, “Arise, shine:” the other says, “Make the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.” It is evident, that, whichever we obey, we must of necessity disobey the other.]

3. Their services are inconsistent—

[This appears in part from what has been already spoken. But the inconsistency is expressly and frequently stated by God himself. “If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him^d:” “the friendship of the world is enmity with God^e:” “the minding of earthly things marks us enemies of the cross of Christ^f:” “the carnal mind is enmity against God^g,” and “we must mortify it, if ever we would live^h.”

Here the point is determined by God himself: and it is carried further than under the preceding head: for, if we would serve God acceptably, we must not only in some things disobey the commands of the world, but must utterly renounce all kind of allegiance to it. We must even oppose it, and fight against it. To parley with it, is perfidy; to make a truce with it, is treason.]

^a Rev. xi. 15.

^b 2 Pet. iii. 13.

^c John vii. 7. 2 Tim. iii. 12. See a specimen, Esth. iii. 8, 9. Acts xvi. 19—24. and xvii. 6, 7.

^d 1 John ii. 15, 16.

^e Jam. iv. 4.

^f Eph. iii. 18, 19.

^g Rom. viii. 7.

^h Rom. viii. 13.

People standing very differently affected towards the world, we must ADDRESS,

1. Those who are altogether servants of the world—

[Too many, alas! think not of any thing but the world: they find no pleasure but in its services. Now, we grant that its service is pleasing to flesh and blood: but to whom has it ever afforded solid and permanent satisfaction? — — — But suppose it could satisfy us *here*, what can it do for us *here-after*? If we have served *it*, we must look to *it* for our reward. We cannot expect any reward from God, except indeed that which our contempt of him has merited, “indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish.”]

2. Those who are endeavouring to unite the services of God and Mammon—

[Notwithstanding our Lord has so plainly declared the absurdity of all such attempts, men will not be persuaded to desist from them. They think that they may serve God sufficiently to secure his blessing, and yet serve the world in such a manner as to retain its favour. But, in addition to what our Lord has spoken, such persons have also within themselves a demonstration that their wishes are impracticable. What is the state of their minds after mixing with worldly company, and drinking of the cup of worldly pleasures? Can they go to their God with freedom, and find access to him with confidence? Have they any enlargement of heart in their addresses to him? Are not their services a mere form—a cold, lifeless ceremony, in which they find no pleasure, and from which they derive no benefit? Is it not manifest that they make no progress in religion; and that, while their services are divided, the world has their hearts? Such people’s religion answers no other end than to deceive and ruin them for ever: for God is “a jealous God;” and will despise the offerings of a divided heart.]

3. Those who are halting between the two—

[Many are convinced that they ought to serve God alone; and yet they know not how to turn their backs upon the world: they are afraid of the contempt and ridicule which they shall incur, or of some losses which they shall sustain: and therefore they are undecided in their minds, how to act. But what folly is this! Is not the approbation of God and of our own conscience sufficient to counterbalance all the frowns of the world? and is not heaven sufficient to compensate for any sufferings which we can be called to endure on earth? Let it only be remembered that eternity is at hand; and *that* will be sufficient to make all the concerns of time to appear lighter than vanity itself. Our Lord has plainly told us, that we must “hate even our life itself,

if we would be his disciples." Let us then make our choice: "If Mammon be God, let us serve him; but if Jehovah be God, let us serve himⁱ." Let us say, with Joshua, "*We* will serve the Lord^k."

4. Those who are decidedly in the service of their God—

[Who amongst you has ever found reason to regret that he took a decided part? Who has not found it a ground of exceeding thankfulness to God for enabling him so to act? Go on then, having the world under your feet, and God in your hearts. Be bold, yet be meek, in the service of your Lord. Be meek, I say, and patient under any trials you may meet with. You must carefully distinguish between the ways of the world and the *people* of it: the former you are to regard with aversion; the latter with pity. Let it be seen in your temper, as well as in your conduct, "whose you are, and whom you serve." Shew that, though you refuse to be servants to the world, you are its greatest benefactors. And look forward to the day when God will acknowledge and reward your services in the presence of the assembled universe.]

ⁱ 1 Kings xviii. 21.

^k Josh. xxiv. 15.

MCCCXXIV.

AGAINST CAREFULNESS.

Matt. vi. 25—34. *Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (for after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no*

thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

IF we affirm that men must serve God only and with their whole hearts, we appear to them to require more than is necessary, and to assign them a task which it is impossible to perform. But, whilst they are so averse to hear of what God requires, they do not consider how closely privilege and duty are united: for, whilst we yield up ourselves wholly unto God, he, on the other hand, permits us to look to him for a supply of all our wants. As an earthly master provides for the necessities of his servants, so much more will God, who therefore commands us to leave all our affairs to his disposal, and requires an affiance in him as a very essential part of our duty. Hence our blessed Lord having taught us how inconsistent are the services of God and Mammon, adds, “Therefore take no thought for your life;” that is, whilst you are serving God with fidelity, commit all your concerns to him with full confidence in his paternal care.

Let us consider,

I. The caution here given—

The evil against which we are cautioned is *anxious carefulness*—

[St. Paul to the Corinthians, says, I would have you without carefulness^a.” The word which he uses, is the same as that used by our Lord throughout this whole passage. A *thoughtfulness* about the future is by no means improper: there is a care and a foresight which Christian prudence requires^b: and they who go forward without due deliberation, invariably involve themselves in difficulties^c. The Apostles themselves, who under peculiar circumstances were supported without any care of their own, were afterwards commanded to use such means for their support as prudence dictated^d; and by this rule St. Paul himself walked^e. The ants are proposed to us as examples; and, in truth, we cannot conceive the instinct of animals to be in any thing more worthy of imitation, than theirs is in the particular to which Solomon alludes. They, in the harvest, lay up what will be necessary for their sustenance in

^a 1 Cor. vii. 32.

^b Prov. xxiv. 27.

^c Prov. xxii. 3.

^d Luke xxii. 35, 36.

^e 2 Thess. iii. 8.

winter: and in like manner should we improve all present opportunities with a view to our future good, both temporal and spiritual^f. But they know nothing of anxious care. Thus precisely should it be with *us*. We cannot be too industrious in our respective callings, if only we leave events to God, and rest satisfied with his dispensations.

There are few perhaps who will not acknowledge, that all anxiety about superfluities, or about very distant events, is wrong: but yet they will vindicate it in reference to things which are near at hand, or are of prime and indispensable necessity. But it is respecting *these very things* that our Lord speaks: he bids us take no thought about "food or raiment;" no, not even "for the morrow:" and, because we should be ready to pass over such a caution if it were only once or obscurely given, he repeats it no less than four times in the passage before us, sometimes in a way of plain direction, "Take no thought;" at other times in a way of expostulation, "Why take ye thought?" This marks the vast importance of the subject: and it should dispose all our minds to humble submission and cordial acquiescence.]

How much need there is for such a caution, every man's observation and experience will tell him—

[Even the rich, who on account of their opulence should be thought most out of the reach of this evil, are as much under the power of it as any. No man indeed is exempt from it, unless he have been delivered from it by the grace of God. The worldly man feels it in reference to the things on which his heart is fixed: and even those who are in pursuit of heavenly things, are too often, through the prevalence of unbelief, still subject to its dominion; insomuch that they are harassed continually with disquieting fears, when they ought rather to be "filled with joy and peace in believing." There is therefore no order of men to whom this caution is not proper to be given; since all, from the highest to the lowest, stand in need of it; and it is no less applicable to the people of God than to the ignorant and ungodly world; to those who have "a little faith," as well as those who have no faith at all.]

Let us now attend to,

II. The arguments with which it is enforced—

In this beautiful address, (which cannot be too much admired,) our Lord shews in a very convincing manner that anxious carefulness ought on no account to be indulged.

^f Prov. vi. 6—8. and xxx. 24, 25.

1. It is unnecessary—

[Let us only look around us, and see what God is doing *in the animal and vegetable creation*; how he feeds the fowls of the air, which make no provision for themselves; and clothes with unrivalled beauty the flowers of the field, which have so short a continuance, and such an ignominious end. Can we conceive that God will take less care of *us*, who are so much higher in the scale of being, and whom he condescends to call his children?

Let us see also what he is doing *in and to ourselves*. He has given us a body, exquisitely wrought, and fitted to be a temple of the Holy Ghost. He has endued it not only with animal life, but with a rational and immortal soul. These also he has preserved even to the present hour; and altogether without any aid from us, or any anxiety on our part. If then he has given and upheld these noble faculties and powers, will he not give such provision as shall be necessary for the preservation of them? Can we suppose that He who has bestowed upon us so much, will withhold or grudge the food or raiment that are necessary for us?

Above all, let us see what he has *engaged to do* for his believing people. They “seek the kingdom of God” to be established in their hearts: they “seek his righteousness” and salvation: they seek “in the first place,” and as their one great object, an interest in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the enjoyment of those blessings he has purchased with his blood: and whilst they do this, God has promised that all earthly comforts, as far as they are necessary, “shall be added unto them.” Thus, in fact, *they* have a more secure title to earthly things, and a more certain possession of them, than any other people upon earth. What need is there then for such persons to indulge anxious cares about the world? Both *around* them and *within* them they have an evidence of what God *is doing*; and *in the Scriptures of truth* they have a pledge of what God *will do*. Surely, then, it becomes them to suppress every anxious thought, and to commit all their concerns to the disposal and government of a faithful God.]

2. It is unprofitable—

[*What good can any man obtain* by all his anxious cares? Can he add “one cubit to his *stature*,” or one moment to his *age*? Can he make one hair black or white; or “do even the least thing,” which would not as easily be done without any solicitude at all? On the other hand, does not every

^g ἡλικίαν.

^h This is certainly the meaning of ver. 27. Compare Luke xii. 25, 26.

man who indulges anxiety *greatly injure himself by it*? Every day brings evils enough along with it: and every man shall find scope enough for the exercise of all his patience, without multiplying sources of discontent. What should we think of a man, who, being doomed every day to carry a burthen which he was but just able to support, should be constantly augmenting his labours by taking on him to-morrow's burthen, in addition to that which he was compelled to bear? Yet such is the conduct of those who harbour anxious thoughts about the morrow. And what is a man profited by such folly? What is the effect which he finds invariably produced upon him? Were he to act more wisely, he might pass comfortably through life; but by his own folly he is oppressed and overwhelmed, and his very existence is embittered to him, so that he is almost ready to "choose strangling rather than life."

The manner in which our Lord argues this point, deserves to be attentively considered. We are ready to think in general that carefulness is a fruit and evidence of our wisdom; but he again and again *appeals to our reason*, to convince us of the folly of such a disposition; and defies any human being to give him a satisfactory reason for indulging it. If therefore we will persist in indulging it, let us prepare an answer to that question of his in the text, "WHY take ye thought for raiment?"

3. It is atheistical—

["After all these things," says our Lord, "do the Gentiles seek." That the Gentiles should be making anxious inquiries about the things of this life, we do not wonder, because they know of no higher objects to be pursued, nor of any God who is able and willing to undertake for them. But does such conduct become *us*?—*us*, who know that there is a God, and have been taught to call him by the endearing name of Father?—*us*, who profess to regard this world but as a passage to a better, and to have our affections set entirely on things above? To what purpose have we been instructed in the knowledge of God, and in the great mystery of redeeming love? To what purpose have the unsearchable riches of Christ been opened to us, and the ineffable glories of heaven revealed, if, after all, we are to live like Heathens; careful about the body, as if we had no soul; and depending on ourselves, as if there were no God? Venial as anxiety may appear, it proceeds from atheism in the heart; it overlooks God's providence; it usurps his power; it places *self* upon his throne. If then we would not perish with the Heathen, or rather under a heavier condemnation than they, in proportion to the superior light we have abused, let us guard against this evil disposition, and look to God to supply all our wants according to his own sovereign

will and pleasure. Let us “cast all our care on him,” assured and satisfied that “he careth for us.”]

ADVICE—

Our Lord traces this evil to a want of faithⁱ: hence we see what is its proper *antidote*; and what advice should be given to all who would avoid it. It is that which our Lord himself repeatedly gave to his Disciples, to compose their minds under trials^k, and to qualify them for every part of their arduous undertaking: “Have faith in God^l.” Believe in him,

1. As a God of providence—

[Men think they *honour* God when they limit his operations to what they call great things: but, in fact, they dishonour him exceedingly, for they judge of him by themselves; and, because *they* would be distracted by a multitude of little concerns, they think that *He* would be also; or, at least, that they are unworthy of his attention. But there is nothing, however minute, which he does not order and overrule with as much care as he does the rise and fall of empires. “The very hairs of our head are all numbered.” Let this then be a fixed principle in the mind, that “there is neither good nor evil in the city, but the Lord himself is the doer of it.” As for men and devils, they are all, however unconscious of it, mere agents of his, “a sword in his hand,” with which he effects his own gracious purposes. Be it so then, that we are destitute both of food and raiment for the morrow, and that we know not where to obtain a supply of either, we need not be anxious: for “godliness hath the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come;” and if we call upon him, his word shall be verified, which saith, “They who seek the Lord, shall want no manner of thing that is good:” yea, the very straits and difficulties which we now feel, are “working together for our good,” and shall hereafter form a ground of praise and thanksgiving to our God.]

2. As a God of grace—

[It is *this* view of God that will in a moment silence every doubt and fear. Who can reflect on what he has done, in giving his only dear Son to die for us, and his Holy Spirit to renew and sanctify us, and doubt whether he will overlook our necessities, either of soul or body? Hear St. Paul’s opinion of that matter: “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” The Apostle seems surprised that such a

ⁱ ver. 30.

^k John xiv. 1.

^l Mark xi. 22.

doubt should enter into the mind of man. Be ashamed then, ye who are filled with such anxiety about the issue of your warfare, and are saying, like David, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul." Be ashamed, I say, and learn rather, like Paul, to say, "I know in whom I have believed." You may be reduced to straits in spiritual as well as temporal concerns; but they shall only issue in the fuller manifestation of God's faithfulness and truth. His promise to you is, that "your place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks; that bread shall be given you, and your water shall be sure^m;" and "He is faithful that hath promised." Trust then in him, and "he will keep you in perfect peace:" trust in him, and he will "give you all things that pertain unto life and godliness;" nor shall you ever be "ashamed or confounded world without end."]

^m Isai. xxxiii. 16.

MCCCXXV.

AGAINST UNCHARITABLE JUDGING.

Matt. vii. 1, 2. *Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.*

AMONGST the many faults with which the Pharisees of old were chargeable, that of censoriousness appears to have been peculiarly prominent. In the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, the Pharisee is represented as condemning his fellow-worshipper, and building his own reputation on the ruin of his. To correct that evil disposition, our Lord proceeds to shew the danger of indulging it. We must not however limit his observations as though they were applicable to that people only; for they are of general utility; and the subject they refer to is as necessary for our consideration as for theirs. Some indeed imagine, that a sermon upon such a subject as this is scarcely to be called evangelical: but it should be remembered, that in the Gospel there are two things, a foundation, and a superstructure; that both of them are necessary to a complete building; and that if the distinction between their respective uses be kept in view, they equally tend to the edification of our souls.

In discoursing on the words before us, we must notice,

I. The prohibition—

The prohibition, though given in general terms, must of necessity be limited: and it is of great importance to have its limits clearly defined. We shall therefore,

1. Point out what is *not* included in it—

[It does *not* forbid *the exercise of magisterial judgment*. Magistracy is of God's appointment. It was ordained by him for the restraining of iniquity; and those who are invested with it are "not to bear the sword in vain^a." They *must* hear, *must* judge, *must* determine, *must* enforce and execute the laws: and they who fulfil their magisterial duties with zeal and uprightness, are to be regarded among the brightest ornaments and the richest blessings of a land.

It does *not* forbid *the forming of a discreet judgment*, whether of things or persons, *for the regulation of our own conduct*. We are rational beings, and must walk agreeably to the dictates of reason and religion. Are any things proposed to us for adoption? We must examine whether they be worthy of our choice: we must "prove all things, and hold fast that which is good^b." Do any persons tender their advice, and profess to have their views rectified by the word and Spirit of God? We must not immediately take for granted that they are right, or yield ourselves implicitly to their direction: "Believe not every spirit," says St. John; "but try the spirits, whether they be of God^c."

It does *not* forbid *our declaring of the judgments of God against sin and sinners*. When we state, that "the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men," we are considered by many as violating the rules of charity. But charity does not require us to confound good and evil, or to contradict the plainest assertions of Holy Writ: it would be no charity, but rather the greatest cruelty, to act thus: and it is at the peril of our souls to do so^d. We must "in any wise rebuke a brother^e:" we not only must "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but must rather reprove them^f." It was no violation of this law when Paul reprov'd Peter for his dissimulation^g: nor will it be any infringement of our duty to declare, that "the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God," or to suspend from intercourse with ourselves, and from the communion of the Church, an offending brother^h.

^a Rom. xiii. 1—7.^b 1 Thess. v. 21.^c 1 John iv. 1.^d Isai. v. 20.^e Lev. xix. 17.^f Eph. v. 11.^g Gal. ii. 11—14.^h 1 Cor. v. 11—13.

Doubtless, if these things be done in an uncharitable spirit, they are wrong: but, if done with kindness, and from a sense of duty to God, they will be approved and applauded by him.]

2. Mark distinctly what *is* forbidden—

[The judgment which we pass on others is then faulty, when it is *needless, unfounded, hasty, or severe.*

We are not appointed judges over all mankind; nor have we a right to summon all our fellow-creatures to our bar. If their actions do not concern us, we should let them pass without presuming to pry into the merits of them. We are not to be “busy-bodies in other men’s matters.” God repeatedly puts the question to us, “Who art thou that judgest another?” The same question we should put also to ourselves: “What *right* have I to judge him? what *call*? what *occasion*?” And if no necessity is imposed upon us, we should leave the exercise of judgment to those to whom it properly belongs.

Not unfrequently do men form a judgment without any just or adequate grounds. There is a strong propensity in the human mind to indulge prejudice, and to harbour unkind thoughts both against individuals and bodies of men without any specific reason. When this is done, we readily listen to any report against the object of our aversion, and put a bad construction upon every thing he says or does. It was thus that our Lord was treated by the Scribes and Pharisees: though he “spake as never man spake,” and was altogether “without sin,” yet they always found fault with him, and loaded him with all manner of accusations. The same kind of prejudice still operates in the minds of many, especially against religious characters; so that if a person be only branded with some opprobrious name, it shall be sufficient to degrade him in their eyes, and to give validity to every calumny that malice can invent. Indeed where religion is out of the question, such “evil surmisings” frequently arise; and a mere look, or motion, or word, that was perfectly innocent, shall be construed into a grievous offence, and be made an occasion of vehement indignation. That such judgment as this is wrong, needs no proof: it is too palpable a violation of the golden rule to admit of the smallest defence. Happy would it be if religious people themselves were not too often blameable on this account. They are but too prone to lay a stress on matters of indifference, and to condemn those who differ from them, as severely as if their practice were ever so criminal. But, however this conduct be cloaked with a plea of religion, it is most hateful in itself, most injurious to the Church, and most offensive to Godⁱ.

But further, if our judgment have some foundation, yet is it faulty, if it be rash. We should give to every person an

ⁱ Rom. xiv. 3. Col. ii. 16.

opportunity of assigning the reasons of his own conduct. It is the motive which chiefly stamps the quality of an action; and, till we have ascertained the principle from which any thing proceeded, we never can form a proper estimate respecting it. What injustice was there in the construction which Michal put on the conduct of David when he danced before the ark^k! Had she waited till she was informed respecting the reason of his gestures, which appeared to her in such an unfavourable light, she would have seen cause rather to adore God for him, than to load him with such bitter reproaches. On the other hand, the benefit resulting from inquiry may be seen in the termination of the cause between the Reubenites and the other tribes, on the subject of raising an altar on the side of Jordan. Had not inquiry been made into the reasons of that act, thousands of lives would have been lost in causeless warfare: whereas, on an explanation of the matter, the act was approved, and every heart was filled with joy^l. A similar effect was produced by Peter's explanation of his reasons for going to eat with uncircumcised Gentiles^m. The law of Moses, and even the Roman law, required, that no man should be condemned unheardⁿ: and certainly the same equitable rule is proper to be observed by us also^o.

It is possible, however, that where we have cause for censure, our judgment may be too severe. The act which we condemn may have been wrong, and the principle may have been wrong also; but yet there may have been many circumstances to palliate the fault; and, if we do not take them into consideration, we shall load the offender with an unmerited degree of blame. In like manner, if because of a single *act* we impute to him a *habit* of any sin; or if because one or two persons have done any thing amiss, we impute blame to all the body or party to which they belong; this is a most unjustifiable severity, though, alas! it is but too common. It was in this manner that David's enemies acted, when they made his sin an occasion of condemning religion altogether, and of "blaspheming the very name of that God" whom he professed to serve. And the Apostle tells us, that such would be the effect of misconduct in religious persons, whether servants or others, that "the way of truth would be evil spoken of," and that "the name of God and his doctrine would be blasphemed^p." But the persons who indulge such unhallowed tempers will ultimately be the victims of their own severity.]

Such are the limits of the prohibition before us. Let us now proceed to notice,

^k 2 Sam. vi. 16, 20.

^l Josh. xxii. 9—34.

^m Acts xi. 2, 3, 4, 18.

ⁿ John vii. 51. Acts xxv. 16.

^o John vii. 23, 24.

^p 1 Tim. vi. 1. Tit. ii. 5.

II. The considerations with which it is enforced—

There is frequently, though not always, a visible correspondence between the work and the reward of men, even in this life. “With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful,” says the Psalmist; “and with an upright man thou wilt shew thyself upright; with the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward^q.” In the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount we have many expressions to the same effect. Now this consideration should operate to guard us against indulging uncharitable censures: for if we do, we may expect,

1. A *similar* recompence from man—

[People are invariably grieved when they are loaded with unmerited blame: and though they may not have it in their power to punish the injurious person in any other way, they will almost universally repay him, measure for measure, according to his desert. This is a species of revenge which every man has within his own reach, and can indulge without much danger of reprisal. Accordingly we find, that a censorious and uncharitable man, though listened to on account of the fondness which all men have for scandal, is yet disliked and dreaded by the neighbourhood in which he dwells; because the very persons who listen to his censures, expect that they themselves in their turn shall be the objects of his invective. A man that is kind and amiable, and ready to make allowance for the frailties of others, will usually find reciprocal kindness at the hands of others: but the harsh, uncharitable, censorious person has little to expect but merited hatred and general condemnation. If, like Adoni-bezek, we exercise wanton cruelty towards men, we cannot hope for much mercy when we fall into their power^r. We do not indeed justify this kind of recrimination, because it is the duty of all to render good for evil, blessing for cursing: but, where divine grace has not subdued the vindictive principle, men will “measure to us according as we mete to them.”]

2. A *suitable* recompence from God—

[God considers the sin of censoriousness in a far different light from that in which it is generally viewed. He regards it as an invasion of his right, and an usurpation of his prerogative: and the indignation with which he addresses those who presume to judge their brethren, is perhaps as marked as any that is expressed on any occasion whatever: “He that

^q Ps. xviii. 25, 26.

^r Judg. i. 7.

speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another^s?" So again by another Apostle, "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth." "Why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? We shall all stand at the judgment-seat of Christ. Let us not therefore judge one another any more^t." "It is a righteous thing with God to recompense" good or evil unto men according to their conduct towards others^u: and these are solemn warnings: and, if we will not attend to them, we shall disobey them at our peril: for the express determination of God is this, "He shall have judgment without mercy who hath shewed no mercy^x."]]

ADVICE—

1. Search out diligently your own frailties—

[Those who are most inattentive to their own faults, are most observant of the faults of others, and most harsh in passing censures upon them. If we did but see the numberless evils that we have committed, and the base motives by which our more specious actions have been defiled, we should blush and be confounded before God; and, like those who accused the adulterous woman before our Lord, should find other employment than that of casting stones at others^y.]

2. Consider what mercy you have received at the Saviour's hands—

[How justly might he have left you, as he did the fallen angels, to receive the due reward of your sins! Yet, instead of that, he pitied your state; he came down from heaven in order to apply a remedy; he even shed his own precious blood to wash away your guilt, and to cover it from the sight of an offended God. Go now, with this mercy before your eyes, and gratify your spleen in censuring and condemning your fellow-creatures. No; you cannot do it, if your minds be suitably impressed with the mercy you have received. Go then, and imitate your Lord; and exercise that "charity that shall cover a multitude of sins."]

3. Cultivate a spirit of love towards all mankind—

[See how you are accustomed to act towards those of your own family, or of your own party: how ready are you to veil or to extenuate their faults! Think also how tender you are

^s Jam. iv. 11, 12.

^t Rom. xiv. 4, 10, 13.

^u 2 Thess. i. 6, 7.

^x Jam. ii. 13.

^y John viii. 9.

towards your own faults; and how ingenious in finding excuses for any thing which you have done amiss. Deal thus then with all mankind: regard them all as your friends, and love them as yourself. Only think what, in a change of circumstances, you would judge it right for them to do to you, and let that be the rule of your conduct towards them. Would you have them manifest towards you the “love that believeth all things and hopeth all things?” exercise it towards them. Where their conduct will admit of a favourable construction, fail not to view it on the charitable side: and where necessity compels you to condemn, still cast a veil of love over their transgressions, and hide them, as far as the rights of justice, and the good of the community will permit. If judged yourselves, “let it be a small matter to you to be judged of man’s judgment:” and be content to leave both yourselves and others to the judgment of a righteous God^z.]

^z 1 Cor. iv. 3—5.

MCCCXXVI.

THE BEAM AND THE MOTE.

Matt. vii. 3—5. *And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye.*

OBSERVATION and experience shew, that the less any person is acquainted with his own infirmities, the more he will be disposed to censure the infirmities of others. But as such a disposition is totally repugnant to that love which Christianity inculcates, our Lord cautioned his hearers against it, and taught them, in the parable before us, to scrutinize and reform themselves before they presumed to take upon themselves the office of censuring and reclaiming others.

In this parable we may observe,

I. The evil of censoriousness—

Censoriousness is a compound of pride and malice. It originates in a high conceit of our own worth, and a desire to reduce others to a level with ourselves, or to a state below us. It is an evil,

1. Base in itself—

[The man who censures others professes a high regard for virtue, and a zeal for the honour of God. But what regard has he for virtue who does not cultivate it in his own soul? or what zeal has he for the honour of God, who does not bring his own heart into an obedience to his will? Even supposing that he were not himself notoriously faulty in other respects (which supposition however will never be found true) how flagrant is his breach of duty at the very instant he pretends such a regard for duty! He violates the most acknowledged principle of common equity; he acts not towards others as, in a change of circumstances, he would think it right for them to act towards him; and therefore at the very instant he condemns others, he unwittingly condemns himself. Who does not see the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, who were indignant with our Lord for working miracles on the sabbath, while they themselves were conspiring against his life? Such, in their degree, are all they, who are offended with a mote in their brother's eye, while they have a beam in their own. Well therefore does our Lord address them by that humiliating appellation, "Thou hypocrite." A baser character than this can scarcely exist.]

2. Injurious to our neighbour—

[Every person values his reputation, and esteems the loss of it as a great misfortune. But in judging any man with severity, or exposing needlessly his faults, we rob him of his good name, and impoverish him without enriching ourselves. How injurious such conduct is we may see, if we will only consider what we feel when we are rigorously or unjustly censured. The sensibility we manifest, and the keen resentment we express, are sufficient indications of the injury which we suppose ourselves at least to have sustained.]

3. Insulting to our God—

[God claims it as his prerogative to judge. As he alone is privy to all the circumstances of any case, he alone can judge of it aright: besides, he has appointed a day wherein he will display his righteousness, in awarding to every one a judgment suited to his real character: and he requires us to defer our judgment till that time^a. But in taking upon ourselves to censure and condemn others we invade his prerogative, we usurp his power, we set ourselves in his throne, we supersede, or anticipate at least, his judgment. In this light censoriousness is often stated by God himself; and a holy indignation is invariably expressed against those who shall presume to indulge it^b.]

^a Rom. xiv. 10. 1 Cor. iv. 5.

^b Rom. xiv. 4. Jam. iv. 11, 12. and ii. 13.

Our Lord having exposed the unreasonableness and impiety of this sin, gives,

II. The advice proper for those who are addicted to it—

The evil here reprobated is but too common, and *that* too, even among the professors of religion: yea, perhaps, (their profession not being sufficiently tempered with humility and love) they are more exposed to it than others, from a mistaken idea, that their professed regard for religion entitles them, as it were, to the office of censors. But to every one who has been guilty of it we should say,

1. Consider your own great and manifold infirmities—

[There is no greater antidote to censoriousness than this. While we continue ignorant of ourselves, we shall consider our own faults as few and venial, and shall be disposed to magnify whatever we may see amiss in others. But a knowledge of our own hearts will convince us, that if there is “a mote in our brother’s eye, there is a beam in our own.” We may conceive many extenuating circumstances that may lessen the enormity of *his* conduct; but we shall know many aggravating circumstances to which God and ourselves alone are privy, which may serve to heighten *our* guilt, and to humble us as the very chief of sinners. When the woman taken in adultery was brought to our Lord, he bade those of her accusers who were without sin to execute the law upon her. We all know the effect which a conviction of their own personal guilt produced upon them^c. Thus shall we also drop the stone which we have taken up to cast at our neighbour, when once we are acquainted with our own vileness.]

2. Recollect the relation in which he, whom you would condemn, stands to you—

[As every person wishes to conceal his own faults, so he will be ready to extenuate the faults of those who are near and dear to him. We do not usually hear men descanting on the infirmities of their parents or children, their wife or brethren. Now the person whom the calumniator would traduce, is his brother. No less than thrice in the short space of the text is this endearing appellation given to our neighbour. Is he not entitled then, from this consideration, to some portion of that regard which we pay to our more immediate relatives? Should we officiously pry into his defects? Should we presume to criminate his motives? Should we judge of his general

^c John viii. 7—9.

character by a single act; or take an instance or two of indiscretion, and consider them as fixed and accustomed habits? Surely our "*brother*" should receive far different treatment at our hands. We should cast a veil over his infirmities, and exercise towards him that charity which hopeth all things and believeth all things^d.]

3. Purge your own heart from evil, that you may be the better qualified to reprove or advise others as occasion shall require—

[As persons who dispense the laws must of necessity pass judgment on those who are brought before them, so must all the members of Christ's Church administer fraternal correction or reproof to each other^e. It is not *all* judgment that the text forbids, but all harsh and severe judgment. It prohibits an over-officious prying into the faults of others, and a needless exposing of them to the world; but it leaves us at liberty to give that reproof which is necessary for the reclaiming of an offending brother. But to admonish others with effect, we must attain some measure at least of purity ourselves. Let every one then begin with rectifying his own conduct. Let every one be solicitous to cast the beam out of his own eye, that he may afterwards assist with more propriety and effect in pulling out the mote from his brother's eye. We must not indeed stay till we are perfect before we attempt to benefit our brother; but we should study to attain an unbiassed judgment, and should hide the lancet in a sponge if we would open an imposthume; and in every case we should regulate our endeavours with charity and discretion.]

^d 1 Pet. iv. 8. 1 Cor. xiii. 7. ^e Lev. xix. 17. Eph. v. 11.

MCCCXXVII.

CAUTION TO BE USED IN REPROVING.

Matt. vii. 6. *Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.*

IN the holy Scriptures there are not only such directions as are necessary for the saving of the soul, but such also as are of a prudential nature, calculated for the rectifying of our judgment, and the regulating of our conduct, in less important matters. A pious person would obtain salvation, though he should not be discreet in his mode of communicating instruction

or reproof to others. But it is desirable that “the man of God should be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works:” and therefore he should attend as well to those admonitions which are of secondary importance, as to those which relate to the fundamental points of faith or practice. The words before us are connected with the prohibition respecting the judging of others. To judge others uncharitably will expose us to similar treatment from them, as well as to the displeasure of Almighty God. Before we presume to judge others at all, we ought to be diligent in searching out and amending our own faults; without which we are but ill qualified to reprove the faults of others. We ought also to consider the state of the person whom we undertake to reprove: for if he be hardened in his wickedness, and disposed to resent our well-meant endeavours, it will be more prudent to let him alone, and to wait for some season when we may speak to him with a better prospect of success. Such is the import of the caution in our text; from whence we may observe,

I. That religious instruction is often most unworthily received—

The value of religious instruction is but little known—

[Education in general is esteemed one of the greatest blessings we can enjoy; nor is any sacrifice, whether of time or money, deemed too great for the obtaining of the benefits arising from it. A richly-furnished mind, a cultivated taste, a polished manner, are distinctions which the richer part of the community particularly affect: and *they* are most envied who possess in the highest measure such accomplishments. But divine knowledge is considered as of little worth: though it would *enrich* the soul beyond all conception, and *adorn* it with all the most amiable graces, and is therefore most fully characterized by the name of “pearls,” yet has it no beauty, no excellency, in the eyes of carnal men: the generality are as insensible of its value as swine are of the value of pearls, which they would “trample under their feet” as mire and dirt. Of this however we may be assured, that instruction, even though it be in a way of reproof, lays us under the deepest obligation to him who gives it^a.]

^a Prov. xxv. 11, 12.

Many, instead of being pleased, are only irritated and offended at it—

[Nothing under heaven has ever given more offence than this. Men may utter lewdness and blasphemy, and create but little disgust: but let them bear their testimony against sin, or proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ, and instantly an indignation is excited in every bosom. In the house of God indeed a certain licence is allowed, provided the preacher be not too faithful: but in a private company the mention of such things is considered as a death-blow to social comfort, and is reprobated as an insufferable nuisance. Even in the public ministry those who “labour with fidelity in the word and doctrine” are not unfrequently treated with every species of indignity. No name is too odious for them to bear, no opposition too violent to be raised against them.

It is supposed indeed by some, that the offence excited by ministers arises from the erroneousness of their statements, or the injudiciousness of their manner. But what then shall we say to the treatment which Christ and his Apostles met with? Did our blessed Lord want any qualification that could recommend his doctrine? Did he not exhibit “the meekness of wisdom,” and “speak as never man spake?” And was not Paul guided and instructed by God himself in his ministrations? Yet were both he and his Divine Master represented as babblers and deceivers; and one cry was raised against them both, “Away with them; it is not fit that they should live.”

Nor is it more against the *doctrines* of Christianity that this prejudice exists, than it does against its *practice*. The doctrine of “Christ crucified is still to some a stumbling-block, and to others foolishness:” and the same anger that rankled in the bosoms of Herod and Herodias against John, who condemned their incestuous connexion, is called forth at this time against any one who shall condemn the customs of the world^b. Our Lord’s words may still be used by all his faithful followers, “The world hateth me, because I testify of it that the works thereof are evil^c.” Doubtless the inveteracy of wicked men will shew itself in different ways and different degrees, according to the different circumstances under which it is called forth: but no times or circumstances have ever superseded the necessity of attending to the caution in the text: there ever have been multitudes who would take offence at the kindest efforts for their welfare^d, and, like ferocious “dogs, would turn again and rend you.” Reprove iniquity, and you will still be deemed

^b It is said of Herodias, *ἐνεῖχεν αὐτῷ*, which we translate “She had a quarrel against him;” but the idea seems to be, “She fastened on him, like a dog,” that would tear him to pieces. Mark vi. 19.

^c John vii. 7.

^d Prov. ix. 7, 8.

“the troublers of Israel;” and those who are reproved will say of you, “I hate Micaiah, for he doth not speak good of me, but evil.”]

From this aversion which men feel to religious instruction, it appears,

II. That great caution is to be used in administering it—

The direction in our text was given to the whole multitude of those who heard our Lord’s discourse; and therefore may be considered as applicable,

1. To ministers—

[Though it is not to be confined to them, it does not exclude them. Doubtless where numbers of persons are assembled to hear the word of God, it is not possible to suit oneself to the disposition and taste of every individual. The rule which God himself has laid down must in such cases be followed: “He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully.” A minister must “warn men, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear:” he must “commend himself to every man’s conscience in the sight of God,” “keeping back nothing that is profitable unto them,” but “declaring unto them the whole counsel of God.” Still, however, the caution in the text is necessary for him. He should consider the state of his hearers, and should adapt his discourses to their necessities. Our blessed Lord, knowing how full of prejudice the Jews were, “spake the word to them in parables, *as they were able to hear it.*” In like manner, though we must not seek the applause of man, (for “if we please men, we cannot be the servants of Jesus Christ;”) yet we should endeavour to “please all men for their good to edification:” we should argue with them on principles which they acknowledge; we should be content to give “milk to babes,” and to reserve the “strong meat” for such as are able to digest it. We should pay attention to every thing that may lessen prejudice and conciliate regard: and, though we must not affect “the wisdom of words, which would only make void the cross of Christ,” we should “search out acceptable words,” and be especially careful to “speak the truth in love.” Our great object should be not to “deliver our own souls,” (though doubtless we must be careful to do that,) but principally to “win the souls” of others.]

2. To Christians in general—

[As “men do not light a candle, to put it under a bed or under a bushel, but to give light to those who are in the house,”

so God, when he illuminates any soul, expects that the light he has imparted should be diffused for the good of others. But in endeavouring to instruct others, we should consider the time, the manner, the measure of instruction, that will be most likely to ensure success. In particular, we should not press matters when our exhortations are contemned as foolish, or resented as injurious. Not that our concern should be about *ourselves*, as though we feared either the contempt of men, or their resentment; but we should be afraid of hardening *them*, and thereby increasing their guilt and condemnation. As to *ourselves*, we should gladly “suffer all things for the elect’s sake:” but for *them* we should “weep, as it were, in secret places^f,” and “gladly spend and be spent for them, though the more abundantly we love them the less we be loved.” If, indeed, after all our labour, we find that our efforts are only rejected by them with disdain, we may then with propriety leave them to themselves, and, like the Apostles, bestow our attention on more hopeful subjects^g. As the priests imparted of the holy food to every member of their families, but gave none of it to dogs, so may you give your holy things to others, and withhold it from those who have shewn themselves so unworthy of it.]

We will now APPLY the subject,

1. To those who are strangers to the truth—

[From the indifference which is usually shewn to divine things, it is evident that the value of religious knowledge is but little known. If we could inform persons how to restore their health, or how to recover an estate, or how to obtain any great temporal benefit, they would hear us gladly, and follow our advice with thankfulness; but when we speak of spiritual benefits, they have no ears to hear, no hearts to understand: they are ready to say to us, as the demoniac to Christ, “Art thou come to torment us before our time?” But let it not be so with you. Think in what light God represents such conduct^h — — — what regret you will hereafter feelⁱ — — — and what augmented punishment you will endure^k — — — And may God “open your hearts, that you may attend to the things” that belong unto your peace, before they be for ever hid from your eyes!]

2. To those who know it—

[Whilst we exhort you to be cautious in admonishing others, we would caution you also against being soon

^f Jer. xiii. 17. ^g Acts xiii. 45, 46. 2 Chron. xxv. 14—16.

^h Prov. xii. 1. and xv. 31, 32. ⁱ Prov. v. 12, 13.

^k Matt. x. 14, 15.

discouraged. Think not every one assimilated to dogs or swine because he resists the truth for a season; but give "line upon line, and precept upon precept," and "instruct in meekness them that oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance, and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, by whom they have been led captive at his will."

And whilst you take upon you to admonish others, be willing to receive admonition also yourselves. It is not every religious professor that is so open to conviction as he ought to be¹, and that will receive reproof like David, esteeming it as "an excellent oil, that shall not break his head^m". Watch over your own spirit, therefore, and exemplify in yourselves the conduct you require in others.]

¹ Gal. iv. 16.

^m Ps. cxli. 5.

MCCCXXVIII.

THE IMPORTANCE AND EFFICACY OF PRAYER.

Matt. vii. 7, 8. *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.*

WE need not look for a connexion in every part of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount; because the account of it which we have in this Gospel is nothing more than an epitome, in which only the principal heads, together with some important sayings, are recorded. But, if we suppose the words of our text to arise from what has just preceded them, the connexion may easily be found. The commands, to abstain from all uncharitable judgment, and to be intent rather on searching out and removing our own imperfections, and even when the faults of our neighbour are most glaring, to exercise much prudence and caution in reproving him; these commands, I say, are difficult to be obeyed: and therefore our Lord encourages us by the consideration, that we may obtain by prayer whatever wisdom or strength we may stand in need of. The import of the text, however, will be the same, whether we take it as detached from the preceding context, or as connected

with it: and it will naturally lead us to set before you the *nature*, the *importance*, and the *efficacy* of prayer.

I. Its nature—

Prayer is not indeed defined in the words before us; but we may collect from the different terms by which it is designated, what are its inseparable attendants and its characteristic marks:

1. Earnest desires—

[The words, “ask,” “seek,” “knock,” must certainly imply a solicitude to obtain some specific object. Now this is the very life and essence of prayer. It is not the posture of the body, or a repeating of any words, either with or without a form, that can be called prayer; but a prostration of the soul before God, accompanied with an ardent desire of acceptance with him. We may confess our vileness in the most humiliating terms, or petition for mercy with the most suitable pleas, or render thanks to God in copious and devout acknowledgments; and yet, if our hearts have not felt what our lips have uttered, we have offered no acceptable service to God: “we have worshipped him in vain, because we have drawn nigh to him with our lips when our hearts were far from him.” Desires in the soul will be accounted as prayer, though not expressed in words^a; but words without desires are no better than a solemn mockery.]

2. Persevering endeavours—

[A mere exclamation under an impression of terror cannot be considered as prayer: prayer imports such a desire after divine blessings as engages us in the pursuit of them from day to day: and this also is intimated in the very terms of our text. “Asking” only is not prayer, unless we “seek” also for the things in God’s appointed way: nor is “seeking” sufficient, if we do not, like persons anxious to obtain an answer, continue “knocking” at the door of mercy. We do not indeed deny but that a prayer may be *offered* by one who speedily turns back again from God; but it is not *accepted*; and it is of *acceptable* prayer that we speak; for nothing else deserves the name of prayer. Whatever therefore a person may do on some particular occasion, he prays not to any good purpose, unless he “set his face” determinately to seek after God, and to obtain from him those daily supplies of mercy and grace which his soul needeth. Hence the command of God is, “Pray without ceasing;” “Continue instant in prayer;” “Pray with all prayer

^a Isai. xxvi. 8, 9. Ps. xxxviii. 9. Rom. viii. 26.

and supplication in the Spirit, watching thereunto with all perseverance^b.”]

3. Humble expectation—

[Here again the terms of our text afford us a correct idea of the duty of prayer. It is evident that when a person “asks,” it is with some hope of receiving; and when he “seeks,” he has some prospect of finding; and if he “knock” at a door, it is with some expectation that it shall be opened to him. Now this, beyond every thing else, marks the true character of prayer. “In the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee,” says the Psalmist, “and will *look up*^c,” that is, I will look up in expectation of receiving an answer to my prayers. It is to the prayer of faith that the promise of an answer is given: “Whatsoever ye shall ask, *believing*, ye shall receive.” Prayer destitute of this qualification is declared to be of no avail whatever: the man that offers it “must not think of receiving any thing from the Lord^d.” Hence the true and acceptable suppliant is distinguished as “looking unto God as a servant does to the hand of his master^e,” and as “waiting upon God for his salvation^f.”]

The nature of prayer being explained from the text, we proceed to notice,

II. Its importance—

[We cannot but observe throughout the whole text the inseparable connexion between the means and the end. It is thought by many that it is unnecessary to pray; because God, being omniscient, stands in no need of information from us; and being of his own nature inclined to mercy, he needs not our importunity to prevail upon him. But these objections betray an utter ignorance of the intent of prayer. Prayer is not intended to give information to God, but to impress our own minds with a sense of our dependence upon him, and to give him glory as the only fountain of all our benefits. Moreover, prayer, though often represented as prevailing with God, is not designed to dispose him to any thing to which he was before averse; but only to bring our souls to such a state as may prepare us for a worthy reception of those blessings which God has previously determined to bestow. Though, therefore, prayer does not answer, nor is intended to answer, the ends which ignorant persons are ready to suppose, it does answer the most valuable ends; which are intimately connected with the salvation of our souls.

But we will suppose that there were no connexion whatever

^b Eph. vi. 18.

^c Ps. v. 3.

^d Jam. i. 5—7.

^e Ps. cxxiii. 2.

^f Ps. cxxx. 5, 6.

between the means and the end; still, if God has united them, it does not become us to put them asunder; nor can we ever expect the Divine blessing, if we attempt to separate them. Moses was commanded to take his stick, or rod, and with that to work miracles in Egypt. What would he have wrought, if, in contempt of such means, he had left his rod behind him? The Israelites were commanded to march round Jericho on seven successive days, and then to blow with rams' horns. Suppose they had disregarded these means on account of their inadequacy to produce any important result, would the walls of Jericho have fallen down? Or if Naaman had persisted in preferring the waters of Abana and Pharpar to those of Jordan, would he have been healed of his leprosy? Thus then, whether prayer have any proper effect or not, we must use it as God's ordinance; and if we will not use it, we shall infallibly lose those blessings, which, in the use of the appointed means, we might otherwise attain. True, it is said of the Gentiles, that "God was found of them that sought him not;" but this refers only to their heathen state: for none ever ultimately found him, who did not walk with him in the daily exercise of faith and prayer: nor can there be found in all the sacred volume one single word that justifies a hope of obtaining any thing at God's hands in the neglect of this sacred duty^g.]

On the contrary, when prayer is offered aright, the whole inspired volume attests,

III. Its efficacy—

[Nothing can be more express than the declarations of our text on this subject. The repetition of them is intended to assure us that no man shall ever "seek God's face in vain." It is of importance to observe, that in the promises before us there is no limitation whatever, either as to the person asking or the blessing desired. A person may have been as wicked as Manasseh himself, yet shall he not be cast out, provided he come to God with unfeigned penitence *in the name of Jesus Christ*. It must be remembered, that, since the coming of Christ, it is indispensably necessary that we should offer all our petitions *in his name*. *This*, in fact, was done even under the Jewish dispensation: for every penitent was obliged to put his hand upon the head of his sacrifice; and, when the Jews were in captivity, and consequently were unable to offer sacrifices, they must look towards the temple; which was a distinguished type of Christ, "in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." Let but our prayers be offered in an humble dependence on the sacrifice and intercession of Jesus Christ, and they shall assuredly prevail. God may not indeed

^g Jam. iv. 2.

answer us immediately; and, it may be, that he may not grant the precise thing which we pray for; but he will answer in the best *time*, and in the best *manner*, granting that which eventually will be most conducive to his own glory and to our good. David and the Canaanitish woman were suffered to wait for the blessings they desired^h; and St. Paul, yea, and Christ himself too, were answered, not so much according to the letter, as according to the spirit, of their petitionsⁱ. But if we tarry the Lord's leisure, we may be as "*confident*" of an answer to our prayers, as of our own existence^k.]

In this SUBJECT we may find abundant matter,

1. For reproof—

[How many have never gone beyond the mere forms of prayer; and remain unmoved even when their self-deceit and hypocrisy are thus plainly set before them! How astonishing is this! Methinks, if God had appointed only one hour in a man's life, wherein he should be at liberty to avail himself of the gracious promises in the text, one would suppose that the whole universe should not be able to divert his attention from this sacred duty: he would long for the appointed season to arrive; he would meditate beforehand on every thing which he could desire to obtain; and he would employ every moment of the prescribed time in most importunate supplications. So, I say, we might suppose; but experience proves, that, notwithstanding there is not an hour in our whole lives wherein we may not avail ourselves of this privilege, the generality have never found one single hour for that holy employment. But would it be thus if God were for one hour to allow this privilege to those who are shut up in hell? If the doors of hell might be opened for their escape, would *they* neglect to "knock?" If all the blessings of grace and glory might be obtained by them, would *they* neglect to "ask?" O then, let us "seek the Lord whilst he *is near*"; let us call upon him, whilst he *may be found*." Think what a bitter reflection it will be in the eternal world, that we might have escaped the miseries of hell, and obtained the glory of heaven, by the exercise of humble and believing prayer, and we would not: we did not regard either the one or the other, as worth asking for. O that we may now be convinced of our folly, and not be left to bewail it to all eternity!]

2. For encouragement—

[If God had bidden us do some great thing to obtain his favour, we should have been ready to do it. The poor benighted

^h Ps. xl. 1—3. and lxix. 3. Matt. xv. 22—27.

ⁱ 2 Cor. xii. 7—9. Heb. v. 7.

^k 1 John v. 14, 15.

heathen, what pains and penances do not *they* undergo to obtain the favour of their gods! Yet no such things are required of *us*: we have nothing to do, but to “ask, and seek, and knock.” Surely we should rejoice in so great a privilege, and determine to “take the kingdom of heaven by the holy violence” of faith and prayer.

But some are discouraged, because they cannot pray with any fluency or enlargement of heart. Let not this however distress the minds of any. It is *humility*, and not *fluency*, that makes our prayers acceptable: and many a person who can only seek the Lord with sighs, and groans, and tears, will find acceptance with him, whilst others, who are admired by men, or filled with self-complacency, will be rejected. Never, from the foundation of the world, was there a better prayer than that of the publican, “God be merciful to me a sinner!”

But some are discouraged because they have prayed long without receiving any answer to their prayers. Let not, however, any despond on this account. God may have answered them, though not precisely in the way that they expected: and the very continuance of their prayers is an evidence that they have not prayed in vain. It is evident at least that God has given them his Holy Spirit, as a Spirit of grace and of supplication; and this is a *pledge* and *earnest* of other blessings which they stand in need of. Let them “tarry the Lord’s leisure, and he will comfort their hearts;” “let them wait, I say, upon the Lord¹.”]

¹ See Isai. xl. 30, 31. exemplified by Luke xi. 1—4. and xviii. 1—7.

MCCCXXIX.

GOD’S READINESS TO GIVE HIS HOLY SPIRIT.

Matt. vii. 9—11. *Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?*

TO argue from ourselves to the Deity, and to conclude that, because we should do, or forbear any particular thing, he would do the same, is, in many cases, extremely fallacious; because many things may be proper as a rule of our conduct towards others, which can in no respect be applied to the moral

Governor of the universe. There are, however, some instances wherein such an argument may be urged, not only with propriety, but with great effect. Such an instance occurs in the passage we have now read; in considering which, we shall,

I. Point out the force of our Lord's appeal—

Our Lord addresses himself both to *our feelings* and *our judgment*—

[Men who cannot understand a logical deduction, may comprehend, without any difficulty, the argument before us. Every one, whether he be a parent or not, knows sufficiently the feelings of a parent, to answer the question here put to him. We can scarcely conceive that any father should so divest himself of all the sensibilities of his nature, as to refuse a piece of bread to his child. Much less can we imagine, that he should mock his child, by offering him a stone; or give him, instead of necessary food, a serpent or scorpion to destroy him. Who then would think of ascribing such a disposition to God? God is the common parent of all his creatures; and he well knows that his Spirit is as necessary for the imparting and maintaining of spiritual life, as bread is for the support of our natural life. Will he then refuse that blessing to us, when we ask it at his hands; and leave us to perish without affording us the needful succour? It may happen, that an earthly parent may be indisposed, by passion or caprice, to do what is right; or he may be disabled through poverty: but there are no such impediments on the part of God, since he is subject to no infirmities; nor is there any thing impossible with him. We may be sure therefore that he will at all times act worthy of the relation which he bears to his creatures.]

But the force of the appeal lies in the contrast between God and us—

[At first sight the appeal may seem inconclusive, since our children have a claim upon us, but we have none on God; and the gift of a piece of bread bears no proportion whatever to the unspeakable gift of God's Spirit. But it must be considered that we are "evil," so evil as to be capable of the greatest cruelties even towards our own children. Instances have occurred, wherein parents have not only murdered, but even eaten, their own offspring^a; and the treating of them with extreme harshness and severity is no uncommon failing. Yet, with all our proneness to evil, and our readiness, under the influence of passion or temptation, to commit the greatest enormities, there cannot be found a person on earth so depraved, as

^a 2 Kings vi. 28, 29.

to act towards his children, in the general tenour of his conduct, in the manner stated by our Lord. But God, on the contrary, is *good*, supremely, and *only* good, and therefore incapable of doing any thing, which may in the smallest degree impeach his character. Besides, he has manifested his goodness in that most unparalleled act of mercy, the gift of his own *Son*; the gift of his own Son to *die* for us; and that too *unasked*; and at a time when we were *in rebellion* against him; and *when he knew the treatment* which his Son would meet with from an ungrateful world: will HE then refuse us any thing? Will he not give us his holy *Spirit*, when we *ask* it at his hands^b; and *when he knows that the bestowing of that gift will infallibly terminate in his own eternal glory*? It is in this very light that an inspired Apostle states the same argument^c; and therefore we may be well assured, that it is unanswerably conclusive.]

That we may not however rest in a mere acknowledgment of this truth, we shall,

II. Suggest a suitable improvement of it—

Though the great scope of the text relates only to the prospect which we have of receiving answers to prayer,

We may LEARN from it,

1. In what light we are to regard God, when we come to a throne of grace—

[Men in general either think of God as a Being that has no concern about this lower world, or as a harsh master, and a severe judge. Accordingly their prayers are either a mere lip-service, in which they themselves feel no interest; or the supplications of a slave under the apprehension of the lash. But we should rather go to him as a Father; we should consider him as a Being able and willing to succour us, yea, infinitely more willing to give than we are to ask. How endearing is that address which we are taught to use, “Our Father, which art in heaven!” If we could approach him with the familiarity, and confidence, of dutiful and beloved children, how sweet would be our fellowship with him, and how successful our petitions! Then, nothing would appear too much to ask, nothing too trifling to lay before him. We should spread before him our every want; and experience, on all occasions, his condescension and grace.]

^b What in the text is called “good things,” in the parallel passage in Luke xi. 13. is called “the Holy Spirit.”

^c Rom. viii. 32.

2. What we ought principally to desire in all our addresses to him—

[The leading subjects of men's petitions usually are; that their sins may be pardoned, and their ways reformed: and certainly these are important subjects for our supplications. But the offices of the Holy Spirit are very much overlooked even by the saints themselves: and though God will not altogether withhold his blessings, because we do not ask for them in the best manner, yet certainly it is of importance that we should feel our need of his Spirit, and express those feelings in our petitions to him. We cannot repent or pray, unless God, "pour out upon us a Spirit of grace and of supplication." We cannot know either our disease or our remedy, unless the Spirit be given to us "to convince us of our in-dwelling sin, and of the Saviour's righteousness." It is the Spirit's office "to glorify Christ, and to take of the things that are his, and shew them unto us." If we would "mortify the deeds of the body, it must be through the Spirit's" influence: if we would bring forth the fruits of righteousness, it must be through the operation of the same Spirit, whose fruits they are. Every act of the spiritual life must be performed by the intervention and agency of God's Spirit. As Christ is ALL in procuring salvation for us, so the Holy Spirit is ALL in imparting salvation to us. Our illumination and strength, our sanctification and comfort, are all his gifts; and therefore we should continually acknowledge our dependence upon him, and ask of God the communications we stand in need of. The importance of this is strongly marked by St. Matthew, who, relating the substance of our Lord's discourse, says, "How much more shall your heavenly Father give *good things* to them that ask him?" but St. Luke sums up all good things in *this*, the gift of the Holy Spirit; because, without that gift, all that we possess is of no value; and with it, we cannot want any thing that is good.]

3. The efficacy and importance of prayer—

[Since God has so strongly declared his readiness to give us his Spirit, we may be well assured, that he will not refuse us any thing else: "we may ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us." But, on the other hand, we can expect nothing without prayer: "God will be inquired of by us^d," even for those things which he has promised to give us; nor will he give, if we neglect to ask. This also is intimated in the text itself; his favours are limited to them that *ask* him. It is true indeed, that the first desire after what is good is inspired by him; and, as far as relates to that, "he is found of them that sought him not, and known to them that inquired not after him:" but

^d ver. 10.

when he has once communicated this desire, he expects that it should be cultivated and improved at a throne of grace; nor will he open the gate of heaven to any, who do not knock at it with importunate and believing prayer. And can we think hardly of this condition? What if we ourselves had invited a child to come and ask of us the richest gifts we could possibly bestow upon him, and had done every thing in our power to assure him of our unalterable determination to grant his request; could he reasonably blame us for suspending our grant upon his performance of so easy a condition? or is there a parent in the world who would not say, If you are too proud to ask for it, you shall not have it? Surely then if, through pride, or indolence, or unbelief, we will not make our supplications to God, we may well, yea, we must inevitably, be left to perish.

If this appear awful in one view, in another view it is most encouraging. Many are ready to say, 'Such an appeal as this affords no comfort to me: were I a child of God, I could not doubt, but that he would give me all that I could ask, with greater readiness than I would give a piece of bread to my beloved offspring: but *am I* his child? and, if not, what is this assurance to me?' But behold, as though he had intended to cut off all occasion for such a doubt, our Lord has here dropped the parallel, and says, "How much more will God give his Spirit, (not to *his children*, but) *to them that ask him*?" So then we have no occasion to inquire, Am I a child? We must go immediately to God and implore his best and choicest blessings, with a full assurance of success.

Some perhaps may reply, 'I have tried these means, and found them ineffectual.' But we are sure either that God has already answered in a way that was not expected, or that he will answer in due time. He is a God that cannot lie; and therefore we have nothing to do but to wait his time. Only let us "continue instant in prayer," and heaven, with all its glory, shall be ours.]

MCCCXXX.

THE DOING AS WE WOULD BE DONE UNTO.

Matt. vii. 12. *Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.*

GOD is graciously pleased on some occasions to take those things which are good in men, for the purpose of illustrating his own ineffable and unbounded

goodness. There is scarcely to be found a mother so destitute of feeling as to “forget her sucking child, and not to have compassion on the son of her womb.” ‘Such a monster,’ says God, ‘may be found: “yet will not I forget thee^a.”’ So, in the words before the text, we are told, that, “evil” as men are, there exists not a father so cruel as to give his child a stone or a serpent, when importuned by him for the food that is necessary for his subsistence: from whence this inference is made; “How much more shall your heavenly Father give good things unto them that ask him.” Such inferences are just and legitimate to a certain extent: but they must not be pressed too far. We must not presume to argue, as many infidels have done, “that because a benevolent *man* would not punish his enemy to all eternity, therefore *God* will not:” for there is no parallel between the cases; nor are God’s actions to be measured by such a standard: his written word will be the rule of his procedure; and all conclusions that contradict that, will prove delusive at the last. But though we cannot always argue from what man would do to what we may expect from God, we may safely, and in all cases, infer, from the superabundant goodness of God to us, the obligation which lies on us to exercise all possible degrees of kindness to our fellow-creatures. To this thought we are led by the connexion in which our text stands with the preceding verses. The words we have just read to you are an exhortation founded on the preceding representation of the Divine goodness: and certainly the argument is exceeding strong: for, if God *in any case* condescends to make our good actions a rule of conduct to himself, much more should we make the unbiassed convictions of our own minds the rule of our conduct towards all.

The direction that is here given us, is as important as any in the whole sacred volume. We shall endeavour to point out,

I. Its import—

^a Isai. xlix. 15.

It is almost dangerous to attempt an elucidation of so plain a command, lest we only obscure, whilst we endeavour to explain it. But it is obvious that something must be supplied, in order to guard against the misconstructions which a caviller might put upon the words. The fact is, that all people do of themselves supply what is wanting in them, without being conscious that the sense which they affix to the words is the result of their own judgment, and not the strict meaning of the words themselves. I say there are two limitations which all people do, though unconsciously, assign to the words, and without which they would not be a just rule of conduct to any man : and these are,

1. That we must *exchange situations*, as it were, with the person towards whom we are about to act—

[It would be absurd to say, that we must actually conduct ourselves towards all people precisely as we would wish them to act towards us. There are a thousand menial services, which the more opulent part of the community must have done for them, and which it would be folly and madness in them to go and do for others^b. Besides, there are duties arising out of the very situations we hold ; and which are not duties to any, except to persons who are so circumstanced. Those, for instance, who are in authority, as rulers, or parents, or masters, are not called to obey their inferiors, because they desire to be obeyed by them. Were we therefore to construe the command without any limitation, we must break down all the distinctions in society, and set aside all the duties which God himself has connected with them. To prevent this, we must suppose the person to be in our situation, and ourselves in his ; and then consider, what we should desire and expect from him. If, for instance, we be in authority, we should ask ourselves what treatment we should desire and expect, if we were in the place of our inferiors ; and then we should act with all the kindness and condescension towards them, that we, in a change of circumstances, should expect at their hands.]

2. That we must make, not our *inclination*, but our *judgment*, the rule of our conduct—

[It is not sufficient to change places with the person towards whom we are about to act. For, if we put ourselves

^b Though there are many kind offices which the rich *may* perform for the poor, there are many which, though required by themselves, they *cannot* do for others.

in the situation of a poor man, we might *wish* our rich neighbour to divide his property with us: but this is no reason why we should go and act thus: the thing is unreasonable in itself: and, however we might *wish* it, we should not for a moment think that *justice or equity required it*. So, if we were to put ourselves in the place of a convicted felon, we might *wish* the judge not to put the laws in force against us: but that is no reason why we, if sitting in the place of judgment, should not enforce and execute the laws against others. We must not consider so much what we might *wish* in such circumstances, as what we should, after full and impartial consideration, *think right*. We should think it right that the judge should investigate our cause with care, and make his decision with equity; and, on the whole, should lean to the side of mercy rather than of severity: but we could never persuade ourselves that felons should be permitted to violate the laws with impunity; because *that* would render the peaceful members of society a prey to every daring ruffian. It is evident then that we must call in the aid of *judgment*, and regulate our conduct according to its deliberate and unbiassed dictates.

With the help of these two remarks, we shall be in no danger of misinterpreting the rule before us. Indeed these limitations are so obvious, that, as we said before, they are unconsciously supplied even by the most ignorant of mankind: so that we might have waved all mention of them, if it had not been expedient to mark with precision the limits, which, though generally acknowledged, are but indistinctly seen. In a word, the rule is this: We must consider in all cases what we, under a change of circumstances, should think it right for another to do unto us; and that must be the rule of our conduct towards him.]

Having thus considered the import of the rule, we proceed to shew,

II. Its excellence—

A greater encomium cannot be passed upon it than is in the words before us: “This is the law and the prophets.” But what is implied in this commendation? and what are those particular excellencies which it holds up to our view? It intimates, that the rule is eminently distinguished for the following properties:

1. It is concise—

[“The law and the prophets” constitute a very large volume; to become well acquainted with which in all its parts, requires no little expense, both of time and labour. But, vast as its circumference is, its lines all meet in this rule, as in their

common centre. We speak not indeed of the *doctrinal* part of this volume, but of the *preceptive*. This limitation, like those before mentioned, is necessarily implied, though not expressed: and, if we do not bear it in mind, we shall pervert this best of principles into an occasion of the most destructive error. "The law and the prophets" have a twofold use; first, to testify of *Christ as the ground of our hopes*^c; and next, to state the *law as the rule and measure of our duties*^d. To understand the commendation given to this rule as extending to the law and the prophets in the former sense, would annihilate the whole Gospel, and make the death of Christ of no avail. We must therefore understand our Lord as speaking of the law and the prophets only so far as they contain a rule of life. Moreover, when speaking of them expressly in this view, he comprehends the law under two great commandments, The love of God, and The love of our neighbour; and then he adds, "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets^e." But it is only to this second commandment that the rule in our text refers; and consequently, when we speak of the rule as comprehending the law and the prophets, we must be considered as limiting our assertion not only to the *preceptive* part of the law, in opposition to the *doctrinal*, but to *that part of the preceptive code which contains our duty to our neighbour*. Let it be remembered, however, that there is not a page of the sacred volume which is not replete with instruction upon this point; and that this short sentence in my text is a summary of the whole.

Now if, on every occasion, we had to search the sacred volume for some precept directly to our point, the opportunities of acting would be passed before we had found such a direction as would be satisfactory to our minds. This would be the case even with those who were most conversant with the sacred writings, and much more with those whose time is almost entirely occupied with temporal concerns. But behold, here is a summary, so short, that it is easily remembered; so simple, that it is easily understood; so suited to all occasions, that it is easily applied, by any person, and at any time. Methinks this rule, to a Christian, is like the compass to a mariner. Were the master of a ship destitute of any means of directing his vessel, except those afforded him by the heavenly bodies, he might often be steering a very different course from that which he designed to take: but, by the help of the compass, the most illiterate sailor may know which way to steer: that little portable contrivance will direct him, whether by day or night, whether in a calm or tempest, and that too in every climate under heaven. Precisely thus it is

^c Rom. iii. 21, 22. ^d Matt. xxii. 40. ^e Matt. xxii. 36—40.

with the Christian: there would be many times and occasions, when, if destitute of this rule, he would not know how to conduct himself aright: but, by the help of this, the most ignorant cannot lose his way: his path in every situation is made plain by it; and the “way-faring man, though a fool, shall not err therein^f.”]

2. It is comprehensive—

[“The law and the prophets” contain directions proper for every person, in every rank, under every situation and circumstance in which he can possibly be placed. Nor is this rule at all less extensive: it will direct the king on his throne no less than the meanest subject in his dominions. There is not any single act, relating either to justice and equity, or to kindness and charity, or even to common decency and civility, which it does not equally embrace, and for which it does not provide a sufficient directory.

Under the Jewish dispensation, the high-priest had an opportunity of ascertaining the mind and will of God by means of his breast-plate. What the *Urim and Thummim* was, or how it conveyed information to the high-priest, is not positively known: but that God did make use of it in some way to convey to him the knowledge of his will, is certain: nor was there any subject whereon God would not have given him instruction, if he had sought it in a becoming manner. Now we are repeatedly told in the New Testament, that all true Christians are both “kings and priests unto God:” and one of the most distinguished privileges which, as Christians, we enjoy, is a liberty of access to God, every one of us for ourselves, without the intervention of any human being; and a permission to seek direction from him on every occasion. And has not God furnished us with the *Urim and Thummim*? Yes, he has: this very rule he has given us to carry, as it were, upon our breasts, that it may instruct us in every part of our duty. We may say respecting it, as Moses says of the Gospel salvation, “we need not go up to heaven, to bring it down from above, nor descend into the deep, to bring it up from beneath; but the word is nigh us, even in our mouth and in our hearts^g.” Wherever we are, we need only set ourselves in the presence of God, and, with humble supplications to him, inspect our own bosoms, to see what light this rule will afford us; and we shall assuredly be guided in the right way. Whether we be rich or poor, learned or unlearned, and whether the subject be

^f Compare Isai. xxxv. 8. with Prov. viii. 9. and Hos. xiv. 9.; and mark the difference between those who have, and those who have not, the compass.

^g Compare Deut. xxx. 11—14. with Rom. x. 6—9.

more or less important, no difference shall be made: if the point relate to states and kingdoms, or if it concern only the smallest branch of moral duty to an individual, it shall equally be made known to us: and if, after that, we err, the error will not proceed from any defect in the rule itself, but from a want of a more perfect discernment of it, or a more just application of it to the point before us.]

3. It is complete—

[What can be added to “the law and the prophets” to make them more complete? Vain would be the attempt either of men or angels to find in them one single flaw or defect: for whilst they comprehend every species of duty, they supply at the same time every motive for the performance of it: “The word of the Lord is perfect.” The same may be said also of the rule before us. No created wisdom can improve it: no man can find in it any thing either superfluous or defective. Its comprehensiveness and conciseness we have before spoken of: and we may now notice, what indeed still more clearly displays its excellence, its singular operation on the human mind, not merely as a light to direct us in the path we should go, but as an incentive to us to walk in it.

The mode in which this rule operates upon us is this: *it takes the most corrupt principle of the human heart, even that root of bitterness from whence every species of injustice springs; it suspends all the operations of that principle on the side of evil, and constrains it to become a powerful advocate of virtue.* Selfishness is the real source of all those evils and calamities which men bring on each other. It is to this principle that we must trace the wars of contending nations, the discord of families, the injustice, the fraud, and all the other evils that are found in the transactions of individuals. From this principle it is, that men are universally disposed to expect too much, and to concede too little. Now this rule, requiring us to put ourselves in the place of him towards whom we are about to act, cuts off at once all scope for the exercise of this principle in our own cause, and enlists it into the service of our neighbour; thereby inclining us as much to favour him, as it would otherwise have inclined us to benefit ourselves: at the same time it marks so strongly the reasonableness of true benevolence, as makes us abhor the thought of acting in opposition to it. I may further add too, that whilst this rule operates thus as a stimulus to virtue, a consciousness of having acted agreeably to it is one of the richest rewards that man can enjoy on earth: if a man fail of accomplishing his benevolent purposes, he has a recompence in his own bosom from a sense that he has acted right himself: and, if he attain his end, he has a double recompence, the testimony of a good conscience, and

the joy of seeing that he has not laboured in vain. Say then, whether this be not justly called *the golden rule*? Surely, whether we consider the mode of its operation, or its peculiar efficacy, or the delight that invariably proceeds from conforming to it, its value is inestimable: nor can any terms be too strong in commendation of it.]

From this subject we may LEARN,

1. The *scope* and *intent* of true religion—

[It is surprising what a jealousy prevails in the minds of men with respect to this. Talk of religion, and especially of Christ, and of “the righteousness which is of God by faith in him, unto all, and upon all them that believe;” and a doubt immediately arises, whether you are not an enemy to good works: this is declared to be the proper tendency of such sentiments; and all manner of stories are raked together to countenance the idea. As for those who deny that “the law and the prophets” testify of Christ, and point him out as the only source of “righteousness and strength^h,” we shall leave them to settle the matter with the Apostle Paul, and with the standard writings of the established Church. We shall at present notice those only who are so fearful about the interests of morality. Now we assert, that, however strongly the doctrine of justification by faith be maintained from “the law and the prophets,” no man that pays the smallest deference to their testimony can fail to insist upon good works. When we read in one part, that “the love of God and of our neighbour are the two great commandments, on which hang all the law and the prophets;” and in another part, that “the doing as we would be done unto, is (in substance) “the law and the prophets;” we are amazed that any human being should be found, who denies the necessity of good works; or that people should be so credulous as to impute this sentiment to all who embrace the doctrine of salvation through a crucified Redeemer. Let the matter be investigated: let it be seen whether Paul was an enemy to good works; whether the great body of our English Reformers were enemies to good works: let us examine the writings of those who now uphold the same doctrine, and see whether *they* neglect to inculcate and encourage good works. Truly, if people were not blinded by prejudice, they would see that one half at least of the obloquy that falls upon those who are contemptuously called Evangelical, is on account of the strictness of their lives and the holiness of their deportment. But, waving all these considerations, this at least is plain, that, whatever fault there may be in any set of men, “the law and the prophets” stand unimpeached: they, with one voice, require

^h Rom. x. 4. Isai. xlv. 24. Jer. xxiii. 6.

submission to the golden rule, and make the practice of *that* to be an indispensable test of men's regard for their testimony. Let this then sink down into our ears; let it be remembered, that the very Scriptures, which inculcate most forcibly the doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ, inculcate also a most exalted morality. The Gospel never did, nor ever will, bring any person to salvation in the way of *sin*; it is in the way of holiness only, and of a very exalted degree of holiness too, that any man can attain the salvation of the Gospel. Not that holiness will save him; *it is the blood and righteousness of Christ that saves him*: nevertheless it is an universal and unalterable truth, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." May God write that truth on the hearts of such as disregard good works, (if any such there be,) and especially on the hearts of all who set themselves against the doctrines of salvation through unfounded prejudices against them, as being of a licentious tendency!]

2. The effect and benefit of true religion—

[This is not to be looked for in the professions, but in the practices of men; yet not in the practice of some easy duties, such as those of generosity and kindness, but in an universal and habitual attention to the rule before us. Where Christian principles have their full operation on the mind, there this rule will be established in the heart, and be exhibited in the life. Take the conduct of the early converts to Christianity; and there you will see the precise change of which we are speaking: and their situations being peculiar, they carried the principle to the extent of selling all their possessions for the support of their poorer brethren. A still more wonderful instance we see in the Apostle Paul, who, from the time of his conversion to Christianity, was willing to do or suffer any thing whereby he might facilitate the progress of the Gospel in the world. Knowing the advantages which, as a Christian, he enjoyed, he was willing even to lay down his own life, if by so doing he might bring others to a participation of them. The same change is still accomplished in the world; only it is less visible; the circumstances of the Church not calling for such a manifest display of it, and the measure of divine grace now enjoyed by the saints being, it is to be feared, more scanty than at that period. But can any one see the effects of religion, even as it is now exhibited, and not confess its excellence? Wherever it prevails, it establishes both in the heart and life this amiable principle: it brings men to do as they would be done unto. Suppose for a moment that one single man, the present disturber of the universeⁱ, were impressed aright by the Gospel of Christ, and brought under the influence of this principle, how many thousands and even millions of the human race would have reason

ⁱ This referred to Buonaparte, in 1810.

to rejoice ! And, if that principle were universally prevalent, what happiness would pervade the world ! Such then is the effect, and such the benefit of true religion. It only remains that we urge you all to cultivate this principle. Let it not be said of any of you, ‘ He talks of faith in Christ, but he is covetous, dishonest, passionate, vindictive.’ Let love reign in your hearts ; and whilst you profess yourselves to be “ trees of righteousness, of the Lord’s planting,” let the “ tree be known by its fruit.”]

MCCCXXXI.

THE STRAIT AND NARROW WAYS.

Matt. vii. 13, 14. *Enter ye in at the strait gate : for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat : because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*

AN idea of candour and philanthropy leads many to adopt sentiments directly repugnant to the Scriptures. They imagine that few, if any, perish ; and that, though the bulk of mankind live in a total neglect of God, they find mercy at the last. But no pretence of candour should induce us so to contradict the plainest declarations of God. If there be any truth in the Scriptures, there are comparatively few who go to heaven. And we need to be awakened to a sense of our danger by the exhortation before us. We shall consider,

I. The duty enjoined—

The path of the ungodly is broad, and the entrance upon it wide—

[There is no difficulty at all in entering upon an ungodly life ; we need only follow our natural bent and inclination. Nor will they who frequent the broad road at all interfere with each other. The gross sensualist, the proud Pharisee, and the specious hypocrite, may have ample scope for their respective pursuits. Sin may be indulged in ten thousand shapes ; and “ all may go astray, every one in his own way^a.”]

^a Isai. liii. 6.

The path of the godly is narrow, and the entrance upon it strait—

[The way of God's commandments is that to which the godly are confined; and the entrance upon it is by conversion. A man must have seen the evil and danger of his former ways: he must have come to Christ who is "the door^b;" and, renouncing every other hope, he must cleave unto Christ with full purpose of heart. Having thus entered, he must go forward in an uniform course of *dependence upon* Christ, and *devotedness to* him. This is indeed a strait and narrow way. A partial repentance, a divided trust, a reserved obedience, will not suffice; our contrition must be deep, our faith unfeigned, and our dedication of ourselves to God entire, or we shall only deceive our own souls.]

To enter upon this path is our bounden duty—

[God never intended that men should follow the imagination of their own hearts. He calls us to himself, and invites us by every argument that can affect a rational being. Nor will he leave us to fail for want of strength. If we will exert ourselves in earnest and cry unto him for help, nothing shall be impossible unto us. Difficult as the duty is, it has been performed by many in all ages. We therefore should exert ourselves without delay. We must not stand aloof, doubting and hesitating whether we shall enter upon this way or not; nor must we put off the time of entering upon it to some more convenient season. The command of God is clear and universal, "Enter ye in at the strait gate."]

We shall see the importance of this duty if we attend to,

II. The arguments with which it is enforced—

No stronger arguments can be urged than those suggested in the text—

1. The broad way, however crowded, will infallibly lead us to destruction—

[Every way of sin will destroy the soul: whether it be open and notorious, or secret and refined, it will surely bring upon us the wrath of God. Nor will the numbers of those who walk in any way at all affect *the quality* of their actions. Sin will be sin, though the whole world should countenance each other in the commission of it. The idolatrous compliance of the Babylonish nation was not the less sinful because it was sanctioned by numbers; nor was the nonconformity of the

^b John x. 9.

Hebrew Youths rendered less acceptable to God on account of the fewness of those who dared to follow the voice of conscience^c. Neither indeed will *the end* of any way be changed on account of the numbers who walk in it. The inhabitants of Sodom, and of the antediluvian world, were not exempted from punishment because they were many. They were overwhelmed, as examples of God's vengeance to all future ages^d. Should not this then make us cautious what path we follow? Should it not stimulate us to flee from the destruction to which we are hastening? O! "*strive to enter in at the strait gate*."^e]

2. The narrow path, however unfrequented, will surely lead us to glory—

[God cannot but delight in holiness; and he will testify his approbation of it in the last day. Was Lot overlooked in Sodom, or Noah in the antediluvian world? So if there were but one faithful servant of God in the whole universe, he should in no wise lose his reward. Every step he took in the good way should be marked by God; and in due season he should arrive at his desired end. And, while tribulation and anguish should be assigned to the disobedient, his patient continuance in well-doing should be rewarded with glory and honour and immortality^f. Should any one then be afraid of singularity? Is it not better to be a persecuted Elijah worshipping the true God, than to be an applauded worshipper of Baal? Let the prospect of glory therefore encourage us to enter upon the narrow path; nor let us doubt but that the enjoyment of the end will amply compensate for the difficulties of the way.]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who are not yet entered in at the strait gate—

[Perhaps you think that the multitudes by which you are countenanced, afford a reasonable hope that you shall not perish; but it is not possible for God to assert the contrary more strongly than he has done in the words before us, Will you then, in spite of this warning, hope that the saved shall be many, and the damned few? Or will you be contented to perish, seeing that you will have so many companions in misery? Alas! what comfort will it be to you to behold others as wretched as yourself? Will their torments assuage your anguish? O dare to be singular in the midst of a wicked world; and say with Joshua, "As for me, and my house, whatever others may do, we will serve the Lord^g."]

^c Dan. iii.

^d 2 Pet. ii. 5, 6.

^e Luke xiii. 24.

^f Rom. ii. 7—9.

^g Josh. xxiv. 15.

2. To those who are walking in the narrow way—

[You, no doubt, are blamed for your singularity. But “it is a small matter to be judged of man’s judgment.” To be reproached for righteousness’ sake is no new thing. Nor have you any reason to repine if it be your lot. You have rather reason to rejoice and leap for joy^h. Remember, however, that you are not to affect needless singularities, and call them religion. If you bring persecution upon yourselves by such means, you bear your own cross, and not the cross of Christ. That alone which will be pleasing to God is, the following of *his* commandments. In *that* you cannot be too exact or resolute. But in *indifferent matters* it is desirable rather to manifest a meek and yielding dispositionⁱ. Yet compliance may easily be carried too far. And, on the whole, it is expedient always to lean to the safer side. You are in continual danger of being turned out of the good path. Nor can you ever be safe except while you are looking to God for his direction and help^k.]

^h Matt. v. 10—12. ⁱ 1 Pet. iv. 12—14. ⁱ 1 Cor. ix. 19—23.

^k Ps. cxix. 117.

MCCCXXXII.

MEN KNOWN BY THEIR FRUITS.

Matt. vii. 15—20. *Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.*

THE greater part of our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount was intended to counteract the errors of the Pharisees, and the false glosses by which they had obscured the law of Moses. But, in the words before us, our Lord seems to have intended to counteract the general influence of the Pharisees. They were in high repute for sanctity among the people, even whilst they were filled with all manner of malignant passions. They pretended to have a high regard for religion; but they were, in fact, the bitterest enemies of all vital godliness. It was of great importance that

the followers of Christ should know how to distinguish them: and for that purpose our Lord gave them a rule which, in its use and application, was easy, certain, and universal.

Let us consider,

I. Against whom we are here cautioned—

The term “prophets,” though often applied to those who foretold future events, is often to be understood of those only, who, like common ministers, were engaged in preaching the word of God. Of these, many were occupied in disseminating error, rather than truth; and therefore they are justly called “false prophets^a.” They were indeed, for the most part, very fair in their pretences, and specious in their appearance; and in this respect were in sheep’s clothing; but their views and designs were hostile to the best interests of the Church: they were proud, selfish, covetous, worldly, and oppressive; and when any opportunity arose of gratifying their malignant dispositions, they manifested their true nature, and shewed themselves to be no other than “ravening wolves.” Of this kind are they,

1. Who lower the standard of the law—

[This was the constant aim of the Pharisees: they explained away the spirituality of the law, and reduced it to a mere letter. Their great object was, to reduce all religion to a few unmeaning observances. Against such persons our Lord, not only in this, but in almost all his discourses, guarded his hearers. He represented them as hypocrites, and said, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees, which is hypocrisy.” Against such also it is necessary to guard men in every age. Persons of this description often obtain considerable influence by means of their rank and office in the Church; and make little use of that influence, except to decry all serious religion. Every thing beyond their own attainments they call enthusiasm; and profligacy itself finds more favour in their eyes than true piety. Whatever therefore be their station or their influence, our Lord bids us to “beware of them.” If indeed they sustain the sacred office of ministers, then we must “observe and do whatsoever they enjoin,” so far, at least, as it accords with the word of God. But we must not follow them one hair’s breadth

^a 2 Pet. ii. 1. False prophets and false teachers are synonymous.

beyond : we must not be led by their influence, either to reject truth, or to embrace error ; but must be on our guard against them ; and “ follow them only so far as they themselves are followers of Christ.”]

2. Who corrupt and pervert the Gospel—

[Thus it was with the Judaizing teachers: they blended the observation of the Mosaic ritual with an affiance in the Lord Jesus Christ ; and thus, in fact, destroyed the very foundations of the Gospel. St. Paul tells us, that they perverted the Gospel, and introduced another Gospel, which was, in truth, no Gospel at all^b : and he guards us against them with a holy vehemence, which might appear almost to border on impiety : “ If any one, even though he be an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.” “ I repeat it,” says he: “ if an angel from heaven so corrupt the Gospel, let him be accursed.”]

But are there no such teachers in later ages? Yes; in every age of the Church they are very numerous. Men are prone to unite something of their own with the meritorious work of Christ, as a joint ground of their hope ; and they are very specious in their arguments : they seem as if they had a great zeal for morality, and were only afraid of countenancing licentiousness. But, whatever be their pretences, we must be on our guard against them. Hear how pointedly the Apostle speaks : “ Beware of dogs, beware of evil-workers, beware of the concision.” Beware then of all such persons, and of their fatal errors : for “ by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified,” either in whole or in part : nor “ can any man lay any other foundation than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”]

3. Who distract and divide the Church—

[Many there were of this description even in the Apostolic age ; men who would bring forward their own particular notions with a view to draw away disciples after them. Some would insist upon something under the name of science or philosophy^c : others would deny some of the plainest truths of Christianity^d : others would plead for a latitude in the indulgence of some particular sins^e : others would exalt one teacher or Apostle above all the rest^f. In short, they were men of an unquiet, disputatious, forward, contentious disposition^g ; loving to have any kind of pre-eminence, and to raise their own credit or interest on the divisions and dissensions of the Church.^h Now, says St. Paul, “ Mark men of this description, and avoid themⁱ.” “ Receive them not into your

^b Gal. i. 6—9.

^c Col. ii. 8.

^d 2 Tim. ii. 16—18.

^e Rev. ii. 14, 15.

^f 1 Cor. iii. 4.

^g 1 Tim. vi. 3—5.

^h John iii. 9. Gal. vi. 13.

ⁱ Rom. xvi. 17.

house," says St. John, "neither bid them God speed^k." And well may we be on our guard against them. Many of them are extremely subtle; and some would almost withstand an Apostle himself^l. But they are only wolves, yea ravening wolves too, in sheep's clothing; and though they may express much concern for the welfare of the Church, they fatten on the spoils of every fold to which they can get access^m.]

But as it may often be difficult to discern the characters of these men, our Lord lays down,

II. The rule whereby we are to judge of them—

It is a plain, acknowledged truth, that we must judge of trees by their fruit—

[No person will expect for a moment to find "grapes on a thorn, or figs on a thistle:" common sense will tell him, that every tree has its own proper productions; and that even the fruit it does bear will not be found in perfection, unless the tree itself be good. "A bad tree cannot bring forth good fruit; nor can a good tree bring forth evil fruit." The quality of the fruit will infallibly mark the quality of the tree itself. If the fruit be good, it will mark the tree to be deserving of culture and regard; but if bad, to merit nothing but excision and the fire.]

Precisely in the same manner we must judge of those who call themselves prophets of the Lord—

[Twice is it repeated, "By their fruits ye shall know them." We should inquire, What is the fruit of their doctrine upon themselves and on their hearers? If the people themselves be proud, worldly, covetous, and despisers of real piety, we have no reason to think that they will ever produce the opposite dispositions in us. If they be resting on a wrong foundation themselves, they are not likely to build us up upon that which God has laid in Zion. If they be disputatious, contentious, ambitious of pre-eminence among their fellows, they are not calculated to be useful to us in bringing us to a meek, humble, and heavenly frame.

If our access to them be not such as to enable us to judge of their spirit and conduct, then we must endeavour to notice the effect of their doctrines upon others: and if we find that this is altogether unfavourable, we must be on our guard to prevent any evil accruing to ourselves. We may see in the Holy Scriptures, what was the temper, and what the conversation of Christ and his Apostles: and, if we find the word ministered unto us has a tendency to assimilate us to them,

^k 2 John ii. 10.

^l 2 Tim. iv. 15.

^m Tit. i. 10, 11.

we may safely yield ourselves to its influence: but, if it be calculated to lower the standard of real piety, and to make us rest in low attainments, we should beware lest we be led astray by it, and beg of God that nothing may ever "corrupt us from the simplicity that is in Christ Jesus."

It may be said, that this will lead those who ought to be learners to put themselves in the seat of judgment and to become judges even of their own teachers. But it must be remembered, that it is one thing to erect a tribunal for the exercising of public judgment, and another thing to form a judgment for the benefit of our own souls. The former is wrong, unless we be officially called to it: but the latter is necessary for our own salvation. We are commanded "not to believe every spirit; but to try the spirits, whether they be of God." We are told also to "prove all things, and to hold fast that which is good." But this we cannot do, unless we examine what we hear, and bring it to the unerring standard of "the word and testimony." Though, therefore, we be not qualified to lay down the law for others, we must all judge for ourselves; since on the exercise of that judgment the eternal welfare of our souls depends. And, if we feel ourselves incompetent for the work, we may apply to God for help; assured that "the meek he will guide in judgment;" and that "a way-faring man, though a fool, shall not be permitted by him to err," in any thing that shall be necessary for the salvation of his soul.]

As a proper IMPROVEMENT of the subject before us, we would recommend to your attention the following ADVICE:

1. Take care to profit by the ministry that you do enjoy—

[Though we must so far have our judgment exercised respecting the ministry of the word, as to determine whether its general scope be likely to profit us or not, yet, when we have reason to believe that the truth of God is proposed to us, we should not listen to it with critical ears: we should rather receive it with all humility of mind; and "receive it with meekness, as an engrafted word, able to save our souls." We should not be satisfied with understanding and approving of what we hear, but should endeavour to reduce it to practice. "If we be hearers only of the word, and not doers, we deceive ourselves"ⁿ— — — Let us then look well to the effect produced on our own souls, and, "as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby."]

ⁿ Jam. i. 22—25.

2. Judge of your own state and character by the fruits you produce—

[If we are concerned to judge of others, much more are we of ourselves: for however wise and pious our instructors may be, it will be of no use to us, unless we be pious ourselves; nor, however erroneous they be, shall we suffer, if we be taught and sanctified by the Spirit of God. We must therefore not be contented with adopting right sentiments; but must take care that they influence us in a becoming manner. We should often bring ourselves to the touchstone of God's word, and examine candidly what advancement we make in the divine life: knowing assuredly that if we be found cumberers of the ground at last, we shall be cut down and cast into the fire: but, if we have abounded in the fruits of righteousness to the glory of our God, we shall be accepted for Christ's sake, and be acknowledged by him as good and faithful servants, who shall for ever participate his joy.]

MCCCXXXIII.

THE NATURE AND IMPORTANCE OF TRUE RELIGION.

Matt. vii. 21—23. *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*

THE criterion, by which we are to judge of our spiritual state, is precisely the same as that whereby we determine the nature and value of things around us. As we know the different kinds and comparative excellence of trees by their fruits, so we may ascertain by our works whether we be real, or only nominal, Christians. It is by these that we shall be tried in the last day; and, according as they have been conformable or not to the will of God, will our eternal doom be fixed. Of this we are plainly warned in the words before us; which, as they cannot be rendered more intelligible, but would rather be enervated, by any attempt to explain them, we shall endeavour to

impress on our minds by an application of them to our hearts and consciences. There are three distinct characters, to whom, in prosecution of our purpose, we shall address ourselves :

I. To those who make a profession of religion, but walk unworthy of it—

[Our Lord not only intimates, but expressly declares, that there are "*many*" who deceive themselves in the matter of religion. It is of infinite importance therefore that we should have just and accurate notions of vital godliness ; and that we should bring our experience of religion to the touchstone of God's word. It is evident that a person may have much, which bears the semblance of piety, while he is far from feeling its genuine influence. He may say, "Lord, Lord," that is, he may not only profess to believe in Christ, and to submit to his authority, but may profess it with considerable zeal and confidence ; he may also preach, and even work miracles, in the name of Christ, and yet be destitute of that, which alone can prove him to be a true Christian. The examples of Simon Magus, and of Judas, sufficiently confirm this melancholy truth^a. It becomes us therefore to inquire, not only what notions we entertain, but what effects they produce on our hearts and lives? Are we "doing the will of God?" Are we doing it cheerfully, uniformly, progressively? Do we walk with God, setting him constantly before us, endeavouring to approve ourselves to him in all we do, and worshipping him stately in the Church, the family, and the closet? Do we act towards our neighbour, as we, in a change of circumstances, should expect him to act towards us? Do we pay a strict regard to truth and honesty in all our dealings? Do we exercise candour in judging, patience in forbearing, kindness in pardoning, generosity in relieving? In short, is *love* the principle, that regulates all our conduct? And are we conscientiously discharging all our relative duties, as husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, magistrates and subjects? Are we, moreover, duly attentive to the workings of our own hearts, in order to suppress the motions of pride, envy, malice, covetousness, impurity, or whatever else may defile the soul? Are we studious to mortify sin in the thought and desire no less than in its outward actings? Now such is the true way to judge of our state : for only in proportion as we are enabled to practise these duties, have we any scriptural evidence of our acceptance with God. We do not mean that the performance of these duties constitutes the *whole*

^a Acts viii. 13, 23. John vi. 70, 71. For further instances of false confidence, see Ps. lxxviii. 35, 36. Jer. vii. 4. John viii. 39, 41, 44.

of religion: but that our faith in Christ is of no farther value than as it manifests itself by these fruits. If we have not oil in our lamps, whereby we are enabled to make our light shine before men, we shall, like the foolish virgins, be excluded, however confidently we may knock at the gate of heaven in expectation of admittance^b.]

II. To those who neither practise religion nor profess it—

[The text, though not so *directly* applicable to persons of this description, may yet suggest to them abundant matter for most serious reflection. While some deceive themselves by a mere profession of religion, there are others who are satisfied with declaiming against hypocrites: who, because they do not pretend to any serious religion, imagine themselves absolved from all obligations to it. But if our Lord does not approve of those who externally honour him, because their lives do not correspond with their professions, can we suppose that he approves of those who openly dishonour and despise him? If *they* be excluded from his kingdom, shall not *these* also? If *they* be disappointed in their expectations, must not the hope of *these* also be as a spider's web? If they who can appeal to the judge himself that they have done much for him, be bidden to depart, shall those, who have never done any thing for him, find a favourable acceptance? Let such persons then learn, that to hate hypocrisy in others is to little purpose, unless they hate it also in themselves. The same rule of judgment is established for all. We shall all receive according to what we have done, whether it be good or evil. There shall be one doom for those who abused the Gospel, and for those who rejected it. If to the former it shall be said, "Depart, I never knew you;" of the latter it will be said, "Bring hither those that would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me."]

III. To those, who both profess religion, and adorn it by a suitable conversation—

[Our Lord expressly declares, that they, who do the will of his Father, shall enter into his kingdom: and his testimony is confirmed by numberless other passages of Holy Writ^c. Persons of this description are extremely different from the self-deceiving professors, not only in their practice, but also in their spirit and temper. Instead of making an ostentatious parade of their religion, they are intent rather on cultivating the inward principle: instead of hastily entertaining an assured confidence,

^b Matt. xxv. 11, 12. Luke xiii. 25—27.

^c Ps. xv. 1, 2. and xxiv. 3, 4. Heb. v. 9.

they are jealous over themselves with a godly jealousy: and instead of being forward to boast of what they have done for Christ, they are ashamed of their best services, and ready rather to dread his displeasure for what they have omitted, than to claim his favour for any thing they have done. They still have indeed many infirmities: and it is their view of these that keeps them low, and perhaps sometimes fills them with doubts and fears. But God will easily distinguish between the allowed sins of the most specious hypocrite, and the lamented infirmities of the weakest of his children: and while he says to one, "Depart accursed," he will address the other in terms of approbation and complacency. Though neither leavened or blemished offerings should be presented *in sacrifice* to God, yet, if presented *as free-will offerings*, they were accepted^d. Thus shall the imperfect services of his people, if offered with a willing mind, come up with acceptance before him, and be recorded at the day of judgment as evidences of their faith and love. Let the believer then go on in a course of uniform and unreserved obedience: and let him not be discouraged because he does not possess talents that attract the admiration of men: but rather let him study to approve himself to God; and he who seeth in secret, will ere long reward him openly.]

^d Compare Lev. ii. 11. with vii. 13. and xxii. 21—23.

MCCCXXXIV.

THE WISE BUILDER.

Matt. vii. 24—27. *Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.*

IT is of great importance in preaching the Gospel, to discriminate between the different characters to whom we deliver our message, and to separate the precious from the vile. If this be neglected, the wicked will hold fast their delusions, and the righteous continue in bondage to their fears: but if we be faithful in the discharge of this part of our duty, those

among whom we minister, will be led to a knowledge of their own proper character and condition. Our blessed Lord, at the conclusion of his Sermon on the Mount, shews us how we should apply our subjects to the hearts and consciences of our hearers. In the words before us he describes,

I. The character and condition of the godly—

Their character is drawn in simple but comprehensive terms—

[“They come to Christ:” this is absolutely necessary to their entrance on the divine life: till they have come to Christ under a sense of their own guilt and helplessness, they have no pretensions to godliness; they are obnoxious to the curse of the law, and the wrath of God^a.

After they have come to Christ, “they hear his sayings;” they sit at his feet, like Mary^b,” desiring to be fully instructed in his mind and will. With this view they study the Holy Scriptures, and “meditate in them day and night:” with this view also they attend the ordinances, and “receive the word, not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the word of God^c.”

They do not, however, rest in hearing his sayings; but they go forth to “do them.” They desire to know his will *in order that they may do it*. They love the most searching discourses, because by them they discover the evil of their own hearts, and are led to aspire after a fuller conformity to the Divine image: nor would they rest, till they feel every “thought and desire captivated to the obedience of Christ.”]

Their condition is exhibited in an apt similitude—

[A man who builds his house upon a rock, shews that, however temperate the weather may be at the time he is building, he expects tempests to arise: and when the storms do come, he feels himself secure, from a consciousness that his house is so constructed as to withstand their violence.

Now a godly man resembles him *in foresight and in security*. He knows that, though he may at present be able to live in some tolerable comfort without religion, it will not be always so: he feels that, when misfortunes, troubles, sickness, and death shall come, he will be miserable without a well-founded hope of immortality. Hence he will not be satisfied with any religion that will not stand the test of scriptural examination; for he knows that no other will prove sufficient in the hour of trial.

When the storms blow, and the tempests beat upon him,

^a John iii. 18, 36. and v. 40.

^b Luke x. 39.

^c 1 Thess. ii. 13.

then he finds the benefit of having “digged deep,” and laid his foundation well. Then he stands immoveably secure: the promise and oath of Jehovah are his firm support: Omnipotence itself upholds him. In vain do troubles from without, or temptations from within, assault him: even in the immediate prospect of death itself he retains his confidence, “knowing in whom he has believed^d,” and assured that Jesus will save him to the uttermost.]

In a perfect contrast to this, our Lord exhibits,

II. The character and condition of the ungodly—

Their character is the very reverse of that already drawn—

[It is worthy of observation, that *nothing is said of their coming unto Christ*. Here is their radical defect: had they ever come as perishing sinners to him, they should have wanted nothing for the perfecting of their salvation: but they are too proud to stoop to such an humiliating method of obtaining mercy: they do not feel their desert of God’s wrath, or their need of a mediator: and therefore, though they will compliment Jesus with the name of Saviour, they will not flee to him for refuge as those who know that without him they must for ever perish.

They will indeed “hear his sayings; but they will not do them.” They may take a pleasure in hearing the Gospel preached; and, like Ezekiel’s hearers, attend the ministration of the word with as much delight, as others listen to a musical performance^e. They may even shew an extraordinary zeal about the ordinances of religion^f, and may alter their conduct, like Herod, in many things^g: but there is some darling lust with which they will not part. When their besetting sin comes to be exposed, they draw back, unwilling to have their wounds probed, and their lusts mortified. When they are required to “pluck out their right eye, and to cut off their right hand,” they turn away, exclaiming, “This is an hard saying; who can hear it^h?”

This stamps their character as ungodly. It is not the commission of any gross sin that constitutes men ungodly; but it is the retaining of some bosom lust, the rendering of only a partial obedience to the law, the “not having the heart right with God.”]

The similitude also reversed exactly describes their condition—

^d 2 Tim. i. 12. and iv. 6—8.

^e Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32.

^f Isai. lviii. 2.

^g Mark vi. 20.

^h John vi. 60.

[A person who, because the weather is fair, builds his house without any proper foundation, will, as soon as storms and tempests arise, find reason for regret. The house, for want of a foundation, will be undermined, and fall. He will then lose all the labour and money that he has bestowed upon it, and perhaps, with all his family, be overwhelmed in its ruins.]

The ungodly man "is like to him" *in folly*, and *in danger*. His religion must come to the test at last: if it bear him through his trials in life, and uphold him with some degree of comfort in death, still it can never bear the scrutiny of the judgment day: then every man's work will be tried as by fire; and that which does not endure the fire, will be burnt upⁱ. How will the folly of trusting to vain delusions appear in that day! What regret and sorrow will arise in the mind of him who has laboured so much for nought! And how "great will be his ruin," when he shall have no shelter from the wrath of God, and when the goodly fabric that he built shall crush him to atoms!

O that we well considered this; and that all of us would build as for eternity!]

Let us LEARN from hence,

1. The necessity of practical religion—

[Religion does not consist in mere notions, however just or scriptural; but in a conformity of heart and life to the will of God. We must not, however, mistake, as though our works were the foundation whereon we are to build (*that* would indeed be a foundation of sand): Christ is the only foundation of a sinner's hope^k; the only rock on which we must build: but then we must shew that we do build on him, by the superstructure which we raise upon him: and if the superstructure be not such as to prove that we are founded on him, our hopes of standing in the day of judgment are vain and delusive.]

2. The excellence of practical religion—

[A house, whose foundation is deep, and fixed upon a rock, will stand, whatever storms or tempests may beat upon it. And thus it is with the practical and consistent Christian. His principles will bear him up in the day of adversity: he may defy all the hosts both of men and devils; for none shall ever separate him from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord^l. And when the most specious structures shall fall, to the confusion and ruin of those who erected them, the wise builder shall dwell secure amidst the desolating judgments and the wreck of worlds.]

ⁱ 1 Cor. iii. 13.

^k 1 Cor. iii. 11.

^l Rom. viii. 38, 39.

MCCCXXXV.

THE EFFECT OF OUR LORD'S PREACHING.

Matt. vii. 28, 29. *And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the Scribes.*

IT has been thought by many, that this which is called the Sermon on the Mount, was not delivered at one time, but is only a collection of sayings which at different times were used by our Lord. But, as our Lord went through all the cities, towns, and villages of Judæa, instructing the people, it is reasonable to suppose, that he should frequently deliver the same truths in nearly the same expressions, because the same instructions were necessary for all. The repetition of them therefore, at different times, and at distant places, is no reason at all why they should not now have been delivered all at once, when so great a multitude was attending his ministry, and he had gone up upon a mountain for the purpose of addressing them to more advantage. Moreover, the words before us clearly shew, that this was one continued sermon; or rather, that these were the chief topics contained in it, together with the principal illustrations of them.

Having successively considered all the different parts of this sermon, we now come to notice,

I. The peculiar character of our Lord's preaching—

We shall not enter upon the subject of his ministry at large, but confine our attention to the discourse before us; which, both in the matter and in the manner, appears to have been well calculated to make a deep impression on his audience.

The things with which they appear to have been particularly affected, were,

1. His wisdom—

[There was an astonishing depth in all that he spoke. His *knowledge of the divine law* was such, as infinitely surpassed all that even their most eminent prophets had ever manifested. David had acknowledged his inability to explore

its depth: "I have seen an end of all perfection; but thy commandment is exceeding broad." But the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of it were open to the view of Jesus, who saw it in all its spirituality, and in its utmost perfection. He was *able to expose* and refute all *the false glosses* with which their most learned teachers had obscured the law; and to set it forth as reaching, no less to the thoughts and intents of the heart than to the most open actions of the life.

There was also *a luminousness in his statements*, which, like the light of the sun, carried its own evidence along with it. And his *illustrations* were so *apt*, so easy, so familiar, so convincing, that every one who was open to conviction was constrained to assent to every word he spoke. Nor did he ever, like the Scribes, dwell upon matters that were altogether useless and unedifying; but he was *always on subjects of prime importance*, the knowledge of which was necessary for the salvation of the soul. In a word, as at an early period of his life the doctors in the temple "were astonished at his understanding and answers," so now, on this and many subsequent occasions, his hearers wondered; "How knoweth this man letters (the Scriptures), having never learned," or had a learned education?]

2. His faithfulness—

[He flattered not the people by countenancing for a moment their expectation of a temporal Messiah, but shewed the spiritual nature of that kingdom which he was come to establish. Moreover, in his reproofs he spared not any: the greatest and the wisest among the people were rather the more exposed to his censures, on account of the influence which they exerted over the minds of others. The fallacy of their reasonings, the defectiveness of their morals, and the hypocrisy of their religious acts, (their alms, their prayers, their fastings,) were held up to universal reprobation; and all the multitude were warned plainly, that "unless their righteousness should exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, they should in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." They were warned too that they must yield a cordial and unreserved obedience to his instructions; that the retaining of any bosom lust would infallibly destroy their souls for ever: that every sinful affection, though dear as a right eye, or apparently necessary as a right hand, must be cut off; or else they would assuredly take their portion "in hell-fire."

These were plain truths; not such as the people had been accustomed to hear from their teachers, who only "prophesied smooth things, or amused them with deceits:" they were such truths as commended themselves to the consciences of all, and made them feel that they were sinners before God. Every

person that heard him bore him witness, that "truly he was full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgressions, and to Israel his sin^a."]

3. His authority—

[The Scribes were in the habit of founding their instructions on their own fallacious reasonings, or on the dogmas of some of the more learned Rabbins. But our Lord appealed to no authority above his own. He reasoned indeed for the conviction of his hearers; but the ground on which he required every word of his to be received, was his own authority; "*I say unto you; I say unto you.*" In this he differed from all the prophets that had gone before him: *they* delivered their messages, as from Jehovah; "Thus saith the Lord:"—but Jesus, being himself "God manifest in the flesh, assumed a right to dictate as from himself;" "Ye have heard from others" such or such a thing; but "*I say unto you*" the very reverse; and require you to receive the word on *my* authority. To this his hearers were ready to submit: for the miracles which he had already wrought without number had evinced his almighty power and Godhead, and were a standing testimony, that his every word was to be received with implicit faith and unreserved obedience.

Doubtless there were many other things conspicuous in his ministrations: his gracefulness and ease, his tenderness and compassion, his zeal and diligence, could not fail of attracting notice; but the points above specified, are those which seem more particularly adverted to in the words of our text.]

Such was the preaching of our Lord. Let us now consider,

II. The effect produced by it on his hearers—

They appear to have been exceedingly struck with his address; yet not so affected as we might have hoped. We shall endeavour to point out,

1. How far the effect was good—

[The word which we translate "astonished," does certainly imply a very deep impression made upon their minds. This impression consisted partly in *admiration*, with which they were filled; and partly in *conviction*, with which they were penetrated; a conviction of the truth, the importance, and the beneficial tendency of all he had spoken. The novelty, united with the circumstances before mentioned, made his ministry appear as superior to that of others, as the effulgence of the sun

^a Mic. iii. 8.

is to the light of a twinkling star. One sentiment evidently pervaded the whole multitude, "Never man spake like this man." At the same time they felt in their consciences, that, if *this* was religion, they had hitherto been ignorant of it in their minds, and destitute of it in their hearts.

Now these two feelings were doubtless good, inasmuch as they argued an openness of mind, a freedom from offence, and a desire of further instruction: and accordingly we find, that, "when he came down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him." But, from all that is recorded, we have no reason to conclude that the impression made upon them was altogether such as might have been wished.]

2. Wherein it was defective—

[*They should have been "pricked to their hearts"* with a deep sense of their wickedness, and should have been led to cry out, like those on the day of Pentecost, "What shall we do to be saved?" Without such humiliation as this they could never be truly penitent: they never could abhor themselves, as every penitent must do, in dust and ashes.

They should have also given up themselves entirely to the Lord Jesus Christ. He required all to take up their cross and follow him: but this was effected only to a very small extent, even to the hour of his death: the whole number of his followers amounted at the last to no more than one hundred and twenty. Hence it is evident, that, whatever effects were produced on this audience, they were only transient; and, consequently, that the word preached did not profit the people, "not being mixed with faith in them that heard it."

They should have been brought to a new and heavenly life. Every thing that falls short of this is in vain. We must "obey from the heart that form of doctrine into which we are delivered;" just as metal, that assumes the shape of the mould whereinto it is poured^b. But we see not in this audience any such tenderness of spirit, such melting of heart, such surrender of their souls, such transformation of their lives. They appear only to have been like Ezekiel's hearers, who were delighted with his oratory, but were uninfluenced by his reproofs^c.]

LEARN then from hence,

1. How ineffectual is the word without the Spirit—

[If any words could of themselves convert the souls of men, surely the words of our Lord Jesus Christ would have produced this effect. But even his discourses were often as water spilled upon the ground. So it was also when his disciples preached: "Paul might plant; and Apollos water, but God

^b See Rom. vi. 17. the Greek.

^c Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32.

alone can give the increase." The truth is, that nothing ever has been done, or ever can, for the saving of immortal souls, but by the operation of the Spirit of God. It is the Spirit that quickeneth us from the dead: it is the Spirit that opens the understanding and the heart: it is "the Spirit that enables us to mortify the deeds of the body," and that renews us altogether after the Divine image. When, therefore, we come up to the house of God, let us look, through the means, to Him who alone can render the means effectual for our good. Let us remember, that the ministry of Christ himself will produce no saving effects without the Spirit; and that the word, by whomsoever delivered, if accompanied with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, shall be sharper than a two-edged sword, and be more powerful than "the hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces."]

2. In what a lamentable state are the generality of hearers—

[Multitudes, where the Gospel is preached with fidelity, will approve the word, and perhaps admire the preacher; but they are apt to put those feelings in the place of true conversion^d. Surely this is a point that deserves to be well considered. We should judge ourselves, not by our feelings towards the word, or towards him that ministers it to us, but by the radical and abiding effects produced upon our hearts and lives. Let it be a matter then of serious inquiry, Wherein does my reception of the word differ from that manifested by the auditors of our Lord? Perhaps I have been often struck, yea, "exceedingly struck^e," with admiration and conviction; but have I been brought to the exercise of deep contrition, of lively faith, of universal holiness? Know ye, beloved, that unless the word have this effect upon you, instead of being to you "a savour of life unto life, it will be a savour of death unto death;" yea, your state will be less tolerable than even that of Sodom and Gomorrha.]

3. What reason we have for thankfulness that we possess the written word—

[Many of Christ's hearers probably regretted that they could not retain his discourse in their memory, and that they had it not in their hands for subsequent perusal. And the generality amongst us have reason to lament our inability to remember what we hear, even when the discourse embraces perhaps only a single point of that which was so diffusively treated by our Lord. But, whether this forgetfulness is our misfortune or our fault, we have this consolation at least, that

^d Mark vi. 10. John v. 35.

^e ἐξεπλήσσαντο.

the sermon of our blessed Lord is in our hands; that we may hear him preach it over to us, as it were, again and again; yea, that we may even ask him to explain to us every point in it. What an advantage is this! What a value should we set upon it, if now, for the first time, his sermon were put into our hands! But, alas! because it is accessible at all times, we are apt to make light of it: and not a few are blind enough to disregard it, because it refers rather to the precepts than the doctrines of the Gospel. Let us not however so slight our privileges: let us study this portion of Holy Writ with peculiar attention: and let us endeavour to get every precept wrought into our hearts, and exhibited in our lives. Then shall we be indeed improved by it, and shew forth the excellence of Christianity in all its perfection.]

MCCCXXXVI.

HOW WE ARE TO FOLLOW CHRIST.

Matt. viii. 19—22. *A certain Scribe came and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head. And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said unto him, Follow me: and let the dead bury their dead.*

ONE would have supposed, that, in such a history as that of our Lord, none but great things would be recorded; and that smaller incidents would be passed over as unworthy of notice: but the inspired writers, notwithstanding an inexhaustible fund of matter presented itself to their view, and they had previously determined to be as concise as possible, were directed by God to relate many circumstances, which to us would have appeared too insignificant to be mentioned in such a work. And for this we have abundant reason to be thankful: for, had any other plan been followed, the Scriptures would have been less calculated for general use. Great events occur but rarely, and to few; whereas small circumstances arise daily and hourly; nor is there any one to whom they may not profitably be applied. The short conversations recorded in the text appear of little moment;

yet are they singularly instructive, and applicable to every human being. They serve in a peculiar manner to put us on our guard against two destructive errors, *precipitancy* on the one hand, and *procrastination* on the other: they guard us, I say, against,

I. Precipitancy—

This is a common and fatal error in the Christian world—

[The Scribe here mentioned was manifestly guilty of it. He came to our Lord professing a determination, which he was but ill qualified to execute. Doubtless his intention was good: he came in a very respectful manner, and voluntarily engaged himself to become a stated follower of Christ: but it is probable that he thought his office and talents, as a Scribe, would procure him a more elevated station among the disciples: and it is evident that he expected to find his adherence to Christ rewarded with an abundance of earthly comforts. Our Lord therefore rectified his mistake, and told him, that his followers must expect no better fare than he himself had, which yet in some respects was inferior to that which the wildest animals enjoyed: for “foxes had their holes, and birds of the air their nests; whereas the Son of Man, though Lord of all, had not where to lay his head.”]

The same fault obtains very commonly amongst ourselves. Multitudes take up a profession of religion upon grounds equally mistaken: they expect to find ease, and interest, and honour, as their portion here: and, because such things are promised to the believer *in a spiritual view*, they are ready to look for them altogether in a worldly view. They see that vital religion ennobles the soul; and therefore they expect the world to estimate it according to its true value. But they are much mistaken: and]

It is of great importance that this error should be rectified—

[Before any person makes a profession of religion, it is requisite that he should consider carefully, *what duties are required of him, and what difficulties are to be encountered by him*. Now *the duties* are, not such as the Scribe apprehended; namely, to wait upon Christ in an external profession of his religion (for we may go to the outward ordinances with the greatest punctuality imaginable, and yet be as far from Christ as ever); but to mortify the whole body of sin; to crucify the old man with the affections and lusts; to be altogether dead to the world, and alive unto God; and to have the same mind as was in Christ Jesus, viewing every thing as he viewed it,

regarding every thing as he regarded it, and doing every thing as he did it. This is a work not to be undertaken lightly, or to be executed easily. There are also innumerable *difficulties* to be encountered. Whatever a man may think about *worldly* ease, or interest, or honour, he will find that he must sacrifice all these, and be, like his Master, “despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” He that will follow Christ acceptably, must “follow him without the camp, bearing his reproach.” He must engage in a warfare, and maintain it manfully, against all his spiritual enemies. He must endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ: and if his own life stand in competition with his duty to God, he must sacrifice it cheerfully, accounting death in his cause the greatest honour.

Nature these things, I say, should be well considered, and maturely weighed. We should consider *whether Christ be worthy of all this labour and sorrow; whether heaven will be a sufficient recompence for it; and whether God has given us a heart to choose him thus for our portion and eternal great reward?* In this manner we should “count the cost;” and then, from a conviction that the pearl of great price is indeed worth all that we possess, we should “sell all, and buy it.”]

But there is another error, against which we need equally to be guarded; namely,

II. Procrastination—

This indeed is even more common than the former—

[The person whom our Lord enjoined to follow him, was already “a disciple:” but it was our Lord’s will that he should become a more stated attendant on him, and a preacher of his Gospel. But, though this man did not intend to shrink from the duty imposed on him, he thought he had a more imperious duty at the present, and that his obedience to the Saviour’s call should be postponed to that. But our Lord would admit of no delay: he intimated to the man, that, however commendable it was to shew a filial respect to his deceased parent, and however short the time might be that he would be detained by it, his call to follow him was clear, and of paramount obligation. He intimated further, that the business which he had desired to engage in might just as well be performed by others, who, being destitute of spiritual life, were unfit for the higher office to which he was called: “Let the dead bury their dead; but go thou, and preach the kingdom of God^a.”

Now, though we may suppose that there was something peculiar in this, and therefore not applicable to ourselves in its

^a Compare Luke ix. 60.

full extent, it is evident that our Lord intended to impress on the minds of all this solemn truth, that nothing could justify a disobedience to his commands, or a delay in dedicating ourselves to his service.

But the fact is, that almost every one imagines he has some present engagement of more importance; and, when called to follow Christ, replies, "Let me first go, and do this or that: let me finish my present business; let me get out of my present situation; let me attain such an object." They will not say, "I will never follow Christ;" but they plead some excuse for not following him at present. Alas! how many thousands perish through this delusion! They think "the fit time is not yet come;" they promise themselves "a more convenient season;" and thus they delay, till death cuts short their purposes, and puts an end to their existence.]

But this evil, like the former, must be banished from us—

[If so specious a plea was not admitted by our Lord, what other can be? We must not understand our Lord as pouring contempt on filial duty; for he requires all to "shew piety at home, and to requite their parents" to the utmost of their power: but he would have us to know that the duty of devoting ourselves to him is superior to every other, and that "the kingdom of God and his righteousness must be sought by us *in the first place.*" If any attention to worldly duties be pleaded for the neglect of our souls, he would remind us that the plea will not be admitted in the day of judgment. On some *particular occasions*, indeed, "he will have mercy and not sacrifice:" but, *in the great work of salvation*, our duty to God must supersede every other. The care of our soul is *the one thing needful*; and *that* must be attended to, whatever else may be neglected. *That* admits of no delay. This is the only moment that we can call our own: and he who postpones the concerns of his soul till the morrow, has reason to fear that God will say to him, "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee." "This should be regarded as the only accepted time, the only day of our salvation."]

From hence then we may further LEARN,

1. How to estimate the things of time—

[Our blessed Lord has taught us this effectually by his example. Though he was the Maker and Proprietor of all things, he chose to dwell in a more destitute condition than the beasts of the field or the fowls of the air, even without any stated place where to repose his head. By this he has shewn what an empty worthless portion riches are; and how contented the poor should be with their humble lot. He has

shewn, that to serve, and honour, and enjoy God is the most desirable state on earth; and that whether we have a larger or smaller portion in our way to heaven, is scarcely worth a thought. To follow him is our one duty, and should be our one concern. If we have much of this world, we should serve him with it; and if but little, we should live, like the birds of the air, in a cheerful dependence on his good providence^b; contented equally “to abound, or to suffer need;” and feeling that when we “have nothing, we are really possessing all things.”]

2. How to act in reference to eternity—

[The thought of eternity must, so to speak, swallow up every other. We must make no account of any thing that is to be sacrificed, or any thing that is to be endured, in the service of our God; but must devote ourselves to him without hesitation and without reserve. If, like the disciple in the text, we are called to preach the Gospel of the kingdom, we should shew what exalted thoughts we have of the ministerial office, by our self-denying diligence in the discharge of it. We should “not seek great things for ourselves,” or “entangle ourselves with the affairs of this life,” but be contented with less of this world’s goods, that we may be more at liberty to advance the interests of our Redeemer and the welfare of his Church and people. But, whatever be our station in the world, we are equally called to “follow Christ;” and on our obedience to that call our eternal happiness depends. I say not, that we should neglect our civil or social duties; for God commands us to perform them with all diligence: but I do say, that where the concerns of time and eternity interfere with each other, we must labour, “not for the meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give unto us.”]

^b Matt. vi. 26.

MCCCXXXVII.

CHRIST STILLETH THE TEMPEST.

Matt. viii. 27. *But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?*

THE more we see of Christ, the more we are constrained to admire him. Every fresh miracle discovers to us more of his unbounded power and grace. The disciples had often been struck with wonder at the miracles wrought by him. They now beheld a miracle

in which they themselves were deeply interested, and were stimulated by it to more exalted thoughts of his august character.

It will be profitable to inquire,

I. What it was at which they so marvelled—

The disciples in crossing the lake were overtaken by a storm, and were in imminent danger of being overwhelmed by the waves. In this strait they called upon their Lord for help—

[They had put to sea in compliance with their Lord's command^a; yet were they not exempt from the dangers incident to navigation. Christ himself submitted to be thus tossed by winds and waves, and in so doing has taught us what his Church must expect in this tempestuous world^b. His disciples, having exerted themselves in vain, applied to him. In this they afford us a good example under our distresses. Perplexed by fear, and agitated by impatience, they addressed him rather in a querulous expostulation. Alas! how feeble is our nature under the pressure of heavy trials! How apt are we to mix our supplications with complaints against God^c! They shewed however, with all their weakness, in whom their trust was, and that they had no hope but in his almighty aid.]

He immediately interposed for their deliverance—

[He could, if he had seen fit, have prevented the storm; but then the disciples would not have discovered their own weakness, nor have seen this marvellous display of their Master's power. It is for the same gracious ends that he permits our troubles^d; and, when they have brought us to him in fervent supplication, he will deliver us from them. He arose from his pillow, and with authority rebuked the storm. Instantly the boisterous winds were hushed, and the roaring billows silenced. Though at other times the waters after a storm remained in a perturbed state, at his command they subsided to a perfect calm. Such is the effect his word produces on "the tempest-tossed soul." Terrors, that appalled the conscience, are dissipated as a cloud^e. Temptations, that agitated the frame, are disarmed of their power^f, and afflictions, that overwhelmed the soul, are made to yield "the *peaceable fruits* of righteousness." Well might they marvel on an occasion like this. Nothing seems so much beyond the controul of man as the winds and waves; but even these heard the voice and obeyed the will of

^a ver. 18.

^c Job iii. 23. and vi. 4. and vii. 20.

^e Acts xvi. 29—34.

^b Acts xiv. 22.

^d 1 Pet. i. 6, 7.

^f 2 Cor. xii. 9.

the Lord Jesus. Well therefore might the disciples exclaim, "What manner of man is this!"]

So stupendous a miracle should lead us to consider,
II. What views of Christ will naturally arise from this display of his power—

The disciples, through their ignorance and perplexity, scarcely knew what to think. But to *us* his conduct naturally suggests the following truths :

1. Christ is the true and living God—

[His sleeping, through fatigue, shewed him to be a man like ourselves; but his exercise of such power proved him to be God also. Moses had opened the sea by his wonder-working rod; and Elijah had made a path through Jordan by his mantle: but both confessedly wrought their miracles in dependence on God. Jesus, on the contrary, performed this miracle by his own power: and who, but God, is sufficient for such things? It is spoken of as the peculiar prerogative of God to rule the sea^g. Let us then bear this in mind in all our addresses unto Jesus. Let us indeed make this *the ground* of our application to him^h.]

2. He is never unmindful of his people's troubles, however he may appear to be so—

[The Apostles rather reflected on him as though he "cared not" for them. But his providential care was not the less exerted because he was asleep. *We* also are ready on some occasions to think him unmindful of us. We too often adopt the impatient language of the Church of old—ⁱ; but the answer he gave to them, is equally applicable to us—^k. We never need to be afraid if we be embarked with him. His ark may be tossed about and driven by tempestuous winds; but though every thing else should perish, *that* would outride the storm.]

3. He will not withhold his aid on account of the weakness of our faith—

[The excessive fears of his disciples shewed their want of faith. He therefore reprov'd them for having so little confidence in him. But he would not on that account refuse their request. In us also he too often sees the workings of unbelief; but he will "not be extreme to mark what is done amiss." He frequently, when on earth, relieved those who doubted his power or his willingness to help them^l: and it is well for us that he still exercises the same pity and forbearance. Doubtless,

^g Prov. xxx. 4. Ps. lxxv. 7.

ⁱ Isai. xlix. 14.

^l Matt. viii. 2. Mark ix. 22.

^h Isai. xlv. 22.

^k Isai. xlix. 15, 16.

however, the stronger our faith, the more speedy and effectual, for the most part, will our deliverances be.]

4. He is as able to save us out of the greatest difficulties as from the least—

[We are ever prone to limit him in the exercise of his goodness; nor are even the most signal manifestations of his power sufficient to correct this propensity^m: but he who created and upholds all things can overrule them as he pleases; and his promises to his people are fully commensurate with their wants. Let us then go to him under our most pressing difficulties, and rest assured, that he is both able and willing to save us to the uttermostⁿ.]

ADDRESS—

1. To the disobedient—

[God has been pleased to bestow on man the gift of reason, and to leave him a free agent in all which he does. Alas! how vilely do the generality abuse this transcendent mercy! They are more regardless of the divine command than even winds and waves. And is this the end for which God has so distinguished us? Is the privilege of volition granted us to encourage our revolt? Is it not rather, that our obedience to God may be a rational service? Let the disobedient stand amazed at their impiety. Let them wonder that the Divine forbearance is so long exercised towards them. Surely they have abundant need to offer that petition—^o. O that they may be more impressed with their danger than ever the disciples were!]

2. To those who truly endeavour to serve the Lord Christ—

[All seasons are not alike in the spiritual, any more than in the natural, world. The greatest difficulties may encompass you, when you have the clearest evidence that you are in the way of duty. But know that your Lord is an all-sufficient, ever-present help. Do not then shun the path of duty because of any trial that may beset you. In the midst of all, possess your souls in faith and patience; and let the triumphant words of former saints be your song—^p. Thus shall you have richer discoveries of your Saviour's care and love, and from personal experience attest the truth of that poetical description—^q.]

^m Ps. lxxviii. 19, 20.

ⁿ Heb. vii. 25.

^o ver. 25.

^p Ps. xli. 1—3, 5.

^q Ps. cvii. 23—30.

MCCCXXXVIII.

MERCY BEFORE SACRIFICE.

Matt. ix. 13. *Go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.*

ST. PETER, speaking of his brother Paul, says, that in his writings there are "some things hard to be understood." The same may be said, in some degree, respecting all the inspired writers. There is, in many of their statements, a height which cannot be explored, and a depth which cannot be fathomed. Even the precepts which they give us are by no means always plain. Some are so figurative, that we are, of necessity, constrained to divest them of their high colouring, in order to reduce them to the standard of practical utility. Thus, when it was said, "Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also^a," we cannot take it altogether in a literal sense, but must understand it as inculcating only a very high degree of patient submission to the injuries inflicted on us. Some are obscure, on account of the unqualified manner in which they are expressed: "Give to him that asketh thee; and from him that would borrow of thee, turn not thou away^b." Were this precept followed in its full extent, the richest man would soon have nothing either to give or lend. Some passages, like my text, are difficult; because, whilst they are expressed in the most *positive terms*, they are to be understood only in a *comparative sense*. Our Lord never intended to say that God did not require sacrifice: for the whole Mosaic law was written to shew what sacrifices God did require. His meaning was that mercy was in itself far superior to sacrifice; and that, where the two came into competition with each other, mercy was to be preferred to sacrifice, and to be exercised to the neglect of sacrifice.

That we may enter fully into this subject, let us consider,

^a Matt. v. 39.

^b Matt. v. 42.

I. The lesson that is here commended to us—

Our blessed Lord, after calling Matthew the publican to the apostleship, condescended to attend a feast which his new disciple had prepared for him. To this feast many publicans and sinners were invited; and our Lord did not disdain to sit down to meat in their company, and to converse familiarly with them. For this he was blamed by the Pharisees, who thought such a condescension, on his part, a violation of his duty both to God and man: to God, who bids us “not to sit with the wicked^c,” and to man, to whom it must appear an encouragement to vice. But our Lord vindicates himself, by shewing, that such persons were most likely to profit from his instructions, as the sick are from the physician; and that his conduct was in perfect accordance with their own Scriptures, wherein this lesson was plainly inculcated, “I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.” The import of this he bade them learn: “Go ye, and learn what that meaneth.”

Now, the meaning of it is,

1. That moral duties are more excellent than those which are merely ritual—

[To this the whole Scriptures bear witness. You will find the utmost contempt poured on ritual observances, when devoid of piety^d: but in all the Bible you will not find one real exercise of grace despised. The smallest good imaginable you will see commended^e, and the will accepted for the deed^f. In moral duties there is a real and inherent excellence: in every one of them there is, what I may justly call, a conformity to God himself, to “whose image we attain by the universal exercise of righteousness and true holiness^g.” They are good at all times, and under all circumstances: whereas ritual observances have nothing valuable in them, except as being appointed of God for his honour, and as being made use of by God for our good. For instance, what is there in the seventh day of the week, or the seventh part of our time? As far as regards the *moral*ity of that appointment, it might as well have been a third or a tenth or a twentieth part of our time. And what is there in sacrifices? The killing of a bullock is in itself

^c Ps. xxvi. 5.

^d Isai. i. 11—15.

^e 1 Kings xiv. 13.

^f 1 Kings viii. 18.

^g Eph. iv. 24.

no better than the killing of a dog: and if God had so ordained, the blood of swine would have been as good as the blood of bulls and of goats. *As commanded of God*, even the slightest ordinance is to be regarded with the deepest reverence: but, divest even Sabbaths and sacrifices of their divine authority, and I say again, they are of no value. Hence David says, "Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt-offering^h." And Samuel, reproving Saul, puts to him this pointed interrogation, "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice; and to hearken, than the fat of ramsⁱ."

2. That, where they come in competition with each other, ritual duties must give way, and be superseded by the moral—

[The whole course of our blessed Lord's conduct upon earth attests this truth. On many occasions he, if I may so say, violated the Sabbath-day; performing his miracles then, as on any common day, and ordering a man to carry his bed upon the Sabbath-day. On account of these *apparent* violations of the Sabbath he was constantly accused as disregarding the laws of Moses and of God. In the twelfth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel we are informed, that he authorized his disciples upon the Sabbath-day to pluck some ears of corn, and rub out the grain and eat it. The act was perfectly legal in itself^k: but, being done on a Sabbath-day, it was construed as a threshing of the wheat, and, consequently, as a work forbidden on that day. But our Lord justified them from the example of David, who, with his followers, had, contrary to an express command, eaten the shew-bread, which was the exclusive portion of the priests. He further justified them from the countless occupations of the priests in the temple, which turned the Sabbath, that should have been a day of rest, into a day of more than ordinary labour. These being *works of necessity*, the one for satisfying of their hunger, and the other for the serving of the altar, the ritual command was made void, being superseded by a call of more urgency, and of paramount obligation.]

Such being the lesson here inculcated, let us consider,
II. The vast importance of learning it—

The manner in which our blessed Saviour speaks, shews that this lesson is far from being generally understood; whilst yet it is so important, that it

^h Ps. li. 16.

ⁱ 1 Sam. xv. 22.

^k Deut. xxiii. 25.

ought to be diligently studied by every child of man. It is a lesson of vast importance,

1. For the forming of our principles—

[In the true spirit of the Pharisees of old, many amongst ourselves lay a very undue stress on outward observances, as recommending us to God. But the answer of Balaam to Balak, who had consulted him on this subject, gives us the true view of it: “Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” This was the question put to Balaam. His answer was, “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good: and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God¹?” To the same effect is the declaration of St. Paul: “The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost^m.” It is the inward disposition of the mind that God regards, and not the service of the body. “The sacrifice of a broken and contrite spirit is, in his sight, of more value than the cattle upon a thousand hillsⁿ.” We must not, then, form a judgment of our state by our punctuality in outward duties, but by the depth of our humiliation, the simplicity of our faith, and the integrity of our souls in the way of holy obedience. To this must we attend, as of absolute and indispensable necessity: and any principle opposed to this will only deceive us to our ruin.]

2. For the regulation of our conduct—

[There must, of necessity, be times when our ritual and moral duties clash with each other. To wait upon God in the public assembly of his people is a duty which we all owe to him, and which should not be omitted without great necessity. But who will say that an attendance upon a sick and dying person is not a sufficient cause for neglecting, for a season, the house of God? Who will say, that if there were in a town a general conflagration, the inhabitants would be ill employed in extinguishing the fire, even though it were the Sabbath-day? True, we must take care that we do not pretend a necessity which does not really exist: for we cannot deceive God; and therefore it becomes us to be on our guard that we deceive not our own souls. But, supposing that we exercise an impartial judgment in determining the question before us, we may be sure that God will approve of the conduct that is

¹ Mic. vi. 6—8. ^m Rom. xiv. 17. ⁿ Ps. l. 8—14. and li. 17.

founded on the rule before us. There is a medium to be observed between a superstitious adherence to forms and a profane neglect of them: and it must be our endeavour so to approve ourselves to God, that we may have his Spirit witnessing with our spirit that we are accepted of him^o.]

° The question of the British and Foreign Bible Society was here considered. The union of all sects and parties, in dispersing the word of God throughout the world, may be supposed to be, in some respect, a violation of order. Then the question arises, Shall a regard to order be considered as a reason for not uniting every creature under heaven in a work that is so good in itself, and so necessary as that of endeavouring to enlighten and to save the world? To any one who should entertain a doubt on this point, I would say, "*Go and learn what that meaneth*, 'I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.' " And the very same answer must be returned to those, who, knowing that a fellow-creature will receive only the Bible which is accredited in his own Church, withholds it from him, and leaves him to perish in ignorance, because he differs from him as to the books that should be included in the Sacred Canon.

MCCCXXXIX.

TWO BLIND MEN HEALED.

Matt. ix. 28—30. *And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto him, Yea, Lord. Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you. And their eyes were opened.*

WE are so much accustomed to read and hear the miracles of our Lord, that the recital of them produces little or no effect: but had we seen the multitudes of diseased people continually coming to him, crying after him, and breaking in upon his retreats when he was in the houses of his friends, we should have been greatly astonished. In the passage before us we have a specimen of their importunity: two blind men, having in vain supplicated our Lord's assistance in the street, followed him into a house, and there obtained that relief, which, from prudential considerations perhaps, he had not chosen to impart in the presence of the people.

Waving many observations which will arise, when

another miracle, exactly similar to this^a, shall be considered, we shall fix our attention upon two things, which are very strongly marked in the words before us:

I. The object of faith—

The whole sacred volume is to be received by us; but God has revealed in it the proper object of our faith: his perfections are the foundation on which we build; and though every perfection is equally an object of our *love*, yet there seems a propriety in regarding his *power* as the more immediate object of our *faith*; because it will be to no purpose to believe him well-disposed towards us, if we do not also believe him *able* to effect his gracious intentions—

[In confirmation of this we may observe, that in the most eminent instances of faith, the power of God has been chiefly regarded^b — — —

And in the most remarkable instances of unbelief, his power has been principally doubted^c — — — Moreover God in a peculiar manner points out this attribute to our notice^d, expostulates with us for not attending to it sufficiently^e, and exhorts us to take it for our *strength*^f — — —]

The address of our Lord to the two suppliants leads us further to remark,

II. The importance of faith—

[Our Lord makes more inquiry after this than after any other grace^g — — — He overlooked many faults, where this was

^a Matt. xx. 30—34.

^b *Abraham*, whose faith is so highly commended, had respect to the power of God to give him a son in his old age, Rom. iv. 19—21. and to raise him up from the dead, Heb. xi. 19. In dependence on this, *Jonathan* attacked a Philistine garrison, 1 Sam. xiv. 6. *Jehoshaphat* went forth against three confederate armies, 2 Chron. xx. 6, 12. and the *Hebrew Youths* withstood the command of the Babylonish monarch, Dan. iii. 17, 18.

^c *Sarah* questioned the power of God to give her a child, Gen. xviii. 12—14. As did also the *Israelites* to give them bread and flesh, Ps. lxxviii. 20. *Moses* himself on one occasion staggered at God's promise, from an apprehension that it could not be performed, Numb. xi. 21, 22. And *Martha* deemed the putrid state of her brother's corpse an insurmountable bar to his restoration to life, John xi. 39, 40.

^d Ps. lxii. 11.

^e Isai. xl. 28, 29.

^f Isai. xxvi. 4.

^g He inquired to this effect of *Martha*, John xi. 26; of the *blind man*, John ix. 35. See also the text.

exercised^h; and disregarded every thing that was apparently good, if this were wantingⁱ — — — He invariably bestowed the highest encomiums upon it^k; and made it, not only a condition, but the very measure of his favours^l — — —]

APPLICATION—

1. To unbelievers—

[If men may manifest a very considerable earnestness about salvation, and yet leave room to doubt whether they really believe in the all-sufficiency of Christ, how evidently must *they* be unbelievers, who have no solicitude about their eternal welfare! To judge of your faith, see whether you resemble these blind men in your consciousness of your need of a Saviour, and your conviction of the sufficiency of Christ to save you? Your need of mercy at his hands is as real and as urgent as ever theirs was: and, if you really believe in him, you are going to him with the same importunity as was expressed by them: nor will you account any time or place unfit for the silent offering of your requests. Think then, what will you answer to the Lord when he shall inquire respecting your faith! And what will you do, if he should say, Be it unto you according to your faith? Alas! too many of you need no greater curse than this. If you have no more pardon, peace, or glory, than in proportion to your present exercise of faith, the great mass of you, it is to be feared, will be miserable indeed. O remember the fate of the unbelieving Israelites; and flee to Christ, every one of you, lest ye perish after their example of unbelief^m.]

2. To those who are weak in faith—

[Can you see the multitude of our Saviour's miracles, and entertain any doubt of his sufficiency? or the examples of so many that were strong in faith, and not be ashamed that, with your superior advantages, you should ever indulge unbelief? O fix it in your minds, that Jesus is able to save to the uttermost, and to keep that which you have committed to himⁿ. Believe in the Lord, so shall you be established; believe his

^h He might have justly reproved the nobleman's impatience, John iv. 49.

ⁱ The zeal and love of Peter were no longer approved when his faith failed him, Matt. xiv. 31. Nor did Jesus regard the ready obedience of his disciples in ferrying him over the lake, when they discovered such timidity and want of faith, Mark iv. 40.

^k Matt. viii. 10. and xxi. 21, 22. See particularly 2 Chron. xvi. 8. where it was not only commended, but rewarded.

^l Mark ix. 23. Matt. viii. 13. and xv. 28. See also the text.

^m Heb. iii. 18, 19. and iv. 11.

ⁿ 2 Tim. i. 12.

prophets, so shall ye prosper^o. But if ye will not believe, neither shall ye be established^p.]

3. To believers in general—

[You will find that peace of mind, purity of heart, victory over the world, and indeed all that you hold dear, vary according to the weakness or stability of your faith. Beware then of ever “limiting the Holy One of Israel.” Beg that “what is yet lacking in your faith may be perfected^q.” And seek to become “strong in faith, giving glory to God.”]

^o 2 Chron. xx. 20.

^p Isai. vii. 9.

^q 1 Thess. iii. 10.

MCCCXL.

OUR DUTY TO THE BENIGHTED WORLD.

Matt. ix. 36—38. *When he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.*

IT is an honour to the present age, that religion has assumed her true character of diffusive benevolence. There is much going forward in the circulation of the Scriptures in the different languages of the world, and in the sending out of missions to every quarter of the globe. But, when I say that there is much going forward, I speak only comparatively with what has been done for ages past: for, in truth, all that is done at present is little more than a drop in the ocean. It is a comfort, however, to know, that the proper office of religion is better understood; and that piety, which, till lately, has been circumscribed within the narrow limits of a man's own family, now comprehends in its efforts the whole family of mankind. This was the religion which our Lord inculcated on his first disciples, and which, from the words before us, I will take occasion to recommend to you.

Let us then consider,

I. The state of the world at large—

Doubtless our Lord spake primarily of the Jews,

whose condition, in respect of piety, was truly deplorable. The authorized teachers were altogether intent on their own temporal interests, whilst they forgot entirely the spiritual and eternal interests of the people: so that the people were really as sheep without a shepherd. Happy would it be if there were not but too much occasion for similar complaints in the present day; and *that* not only amongst other churches, but our own. However, it is of heathens rather that I propose at this time to speak. They, as my text intimates, are in a state,

1. Of destitution—

[The people “fainted” through their want of that nourishment which their priests ought to have administered. And amongst the heathen world there are multitudes who feel their need of mercy, but know not how to attain it. Nothing can be more clear, than that the most uncivilized savages have an idea of some Superior Being, whom they conceive themselves to have offended, and whom they wish to propitiate. For this end, they have recourse to penances, and pilgrimages, and self-inflicted tortures. It is quite afflictive to read of the rites prescribed by the priests of different religions for the obtaining of favour with their deities. They seem to have exhausted their ingenuity in searching out modes the most painful, the most odious, the most absurd. And what is the effect? The people, after all their self-denying efforts, faint as much as ever, under a sense of the fruitlessness of their endeavours, and with fearful anticipations of their future doom. Like Hagar, when her little stock of water was consumed, they see no prospect before them, but to lie down and die. No angel have they at hand to point out the fountain; which, though hidden, is close at hand. And this is the state of many hundreds of millions of our unhappy fellow-creatures, even of the whole heathen world. Would to God it were not also the state of millions amongst ourselves!]

2. Of danger—

[Sheep, without a shepherd are exposed to dogs and wolves, who may tear them to pieces at their will: and, in like manner, are the heathen world exposed to the assaults of that roaring lion, who is never satiated with his prey; even with Satan, who prowls throughout the world, seeking whom he may devour. By temptations too on every side, as well as by their own in-dwelling lusts, are they assailed; so that there is indeed no hope of escape for them: for no shepherd have they, to warn them of their danger, or to point out to them a

place of refuge. A Deliverer, indeed, is at hand with them; if they did but know where to find him, and how to make their application to him. But they have no man to care for their souls, or to give them the information which they stand in need of. Hence "they perish for lack of knowledge:" not indeed like sheep, by a mere bodily destruction, but under a load of guilt, that sinks them into everlasting perdition; even into "that lake of fire and brimstone," where they shall "lie down in everlasting burnings."]

And can we doubt what is,

II. Our duty towards them?

Our blessed Lord has taught it us: has taught it,

1. By his own example—

[He "had compassion on the multitudes." And whence is it that we are so unfeeling towards them? Is it that the heathen are in so much better state than the Jews who attended the ministry of our Lord? Were they who had God in the midst of them by his word and ordinances, such objects of compassion; and are not they who are altogether "without God in the world?" I say then, again, Whence is it that we perhaps, in the course of our whole lives, have never spent one hour in mourning over their unhappy condition, or in praying to God for them? Had the smallest interest of our own been in jeopardy, we should have thought of it, and devised means to avert the impending calamity. But for their souls we have felt no anxiety; nor have we put forth any exertions for their welfare. Truly, we have lain in more than brutish apathy, when we ought to have wept over them, as our Lord over Jerusalem: and to have had great heaviness and continual sorrow in our hearts, as Paul had for his Jewish brethren.]

2. By a particular command—

["Pray ye," says he, "to the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest." And who is "the Lord of the harvest," but Jehovah? for "all souls are his." And who but He can "*thrust forth* labourers into his harvest^a?" For ministration *at home*, where ease, and honour, and emolument, are found, multitudes are ready to *obtrude* themselves, and to *solicit* employment in the sacred office: but when God inquires for labourers in the heathen world, and says, "Who will go for us?" how few are found who are ready to reply, "Here am I; send me^b!" No, in truth: there are excuses enough then: one, like Moses, has not the qualifications for so great a work: another has some temporal occupation

^a ἐκβαλλῆ.

^b Isai. vi. 8.

inconsistent with it: and another has married a wife, or intends to do so, and therefore cannot go. Much labour and little pay, is not the preferment which the generality of us affect: a thousand difficulties rise up to view; and every mole-hill becomes a mountain. And who but God can overcome this sad reluctance? Who can inspire men with zeal sufficient for this holy undertaking? None but He who formed the universe: none but He who called Andrew and Peter from their nets, and Matthew from the receipt of custom. "*He* has all hearts in his hands, and turneth them whithersoever he will;" and can convert a proud and persecuting Saul into a humble, loving, and laborious servant of Christ. We should therefore pray to him to effect this. He is a prayer-hearing God, and will not suffer us to seek his face in vain. The whole night did Jesus spend in prayer, previous to his calling to himself his twelve disciples^c. And who can tell, if we were alike earnest in prayer, what might be effected in behalf of the heathen world? At all events, we are bound to use the means: and we have every reason to believe, that if "we would give no rest to our God," agreeably to his direction^d, he would arise for our help, and get himself praise throughout the earth.]

IMPROVEMENT—

1. Be thankful for the blessings which you yourselves enjoy—

[Are you "faint," from a sense of your own guilt and helplessness? You have those at hand who are ready to offer you "the cup of salvation." Are you exposed to danger? You have shepherds to warn you of it, and to point out to you that Saviour who is both able and willing to deliver. It may be that some of you understand, by painful experience, what it is to feel a sense of God's wrath upon the soul, and to be harassed with "a certain fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation." O, what thanks do you owe to God, that the way of life is so plainly opened to you, and that you are so urgently called to walk in it! Be thankful, then, and avail yourselves of the privileges which you enjoy, and which "many prophets and kings have sought in vain."]

2. Endeavour to extend them to the whole world—

[This is the bounden duty of all, to whom the Gospel comes. Ministers and people are alike bound to use the efforts which are within their power: and the poorest and weakest in the universe may lift up his soul in prayer. I call upon you, then; on you especially who are sensible of your own privileges; surely it will be strange indeed if you do not shew a

^c Luke vi. 12, 13.

^d Isai. lxii. 6, 7.

zeal for God, who has so distinguished you; and if you do not endeavour to impart to others the blessings which you yourselves enjoy. To you who are educating for the ministry I would particularly commend this subject, and say, Not only pray that God would send forth *others* into his harvest, but beg him to give you grace, that you may be ready to go *yourselves*.]

MCCCXLI.

THE LIMITED COMMISSION OF THE APOSTLES.

Matt. x. 5—7. *These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.*

AFTER our blessed Lord had chosen his twelve servants, whom he called apostles, he gave them a commission to go forth and proclaim his advent, just as his forerunner, John the Baptist, had already done. But, considering the unbounded benevolence of our blessed Lord, and that he was really come in order to save the whole world, we are rather surprised at the charge he gave them, especially as contrasted with the commission which he gave them after he was risen from the dead, and which is now given to all who preach in his name. We propose to consider, I. The restriction imposed on them—

They were commanded to proclaim that the kingdom of heaven was at hand—

[By “the kingdom of heaven” was meant the kingdom which the Messiah was appointed to establish. The expression, “the kingdom of heaven,” was generally so understood at that time; and the people to whom the Apostles were sent, were in no danger of misapprehending the tidings which they heard. The whole nation of the Jews were then expecting their Messiah: and, though they formed very erroneous notions respecting the nature of his kingdom, they were persuaded that he was to be a King, and to reign over them, and to put all his enemies under his feet. The same proclamation, and in the very same terms, had been made by John the Baptist^a, and by our Lord himself^b: so that the office of the Apostles was not

^a Matt. iii. 2.

^b Matt. iv. 17.

to bring new tidings to the people's ears, but only to call their attention to the truth which had already been extensively circulated throughout the land.]

But in the execution of their commission, they were restricted to the house of Israel—

[They were “not to go into the way of the Gentiles, or to enter into any city of the Samaritans,” but to give an exclusive attention to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” The Jews, though professing to belong to God, were really “lost sheep,” having gone astray from him, and wandered far from his fold.

But whence arose this restriction, and this extraordinary partiality towards the Jewish people? It arose, I apprehend, partly *from the relation in which they stood to God*, and partly *from the very tidings themselves which were at that time to be proclaimed*.

The Jews were God's peculiar people, with whom he had entered into covenant, and who had been consecrated to him by the sacred rite of circumcision. They were regarded by God as “his first-born;” who were therefore entitled to a priority in every thing which related to their Father's inheritance. Besides, they had been taught to expect the Messiah to be born among them, descended, like them, from Abraham, and of the family of David, whose throne he was destined to inherit. To them, therefore, the tidings would be welcome: and when he should have been received by them who were best capable of judging of his pretensions to the Messiahship, he might with greater propriety and credibility be commended to the Gentiles as their Saviour also: whereas, if he should be in the first instance proclaimed as a Saviour to the Gentiles, a suspicion might naturally arise, in the minds of those to whom he was proclaimed, that he was unwarrantably obtruded upon them, and that his title to that august character would not stand the test of careful inquiry.

In addition to this, it had been foretold, that “the law should go forth out of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem^c; and, consequently, the Gospel must first be established there, in order that it might proceed from thence. Hence, even after our Lord's resurrection, it was enjoined on the Apostles to preach the Gospel, “beginning at Jerusalem^d,” and though the restriction before referred to was then withdrawn, a priority was still reserved to God's ancient people; “salvation being intended for the *Jew first*, and *then* for the Gentile^e.”]

With thankfulness to God, we now proceed to notice,

^c Isai. ii. 3.

^d Luke xxiv. 47.

^e Rom. i. 16.

II. The liberty accorded to us—

The tidings which we are commissioned to declare are more full and complete than those which the Apostles were then authorized to announce—

[*They* could declare only that “the kingdom of heaven was at hand:” but we proclaim, that it is actually established; that the Lord Jesus Christ has vanquished all the powers of darkness, “triumphing over them openly upon his cross^f,” and, in his ascension, “leading captivity itself captive^g.” He is now enthroned at the right hand of God; and will, in due season, “put all enemies under his feet.” True it is, that though his kingdom is at present but very limited, it shall be extended over the face of the globe, and all the kingdoms of the world be comprehended under it^h. *This* we, no less than the Apostles, are authorized to declare: and whilst our authority is the same,]

Our commission is far more extended than theirs—

[Wherever there is a lost sheep, whether amongst Jews or Gentiles, there are we at liberty to invite the perishing creature to the good Shepherd, and to bring him home to the fold of God. The commission given to us is, to “go into all the world, and to preach the Gospel to every creature:” and wherever there is a rebel against God, we may call upon him to lay down his arms, and to submit to the gentle yoke of Jesus, who is “King of kings, and Lord of lords.” Nay more: we are authorized to assure every sinner under heaven, that if only he come to Jesus, “he shall in no wise be cast out.” Cast out, do I say? He shall, from being an alien from the commonwealth of Israel, and a stranger from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world, however far he may have been from God, he shall be brought nigh by the blood of Christⁱ: and, from being a “stranger and a foreigner, he shall be a fellow-citizen with the saints, and of the household of God^k.” There is not a blessing enjoyed by any subject of the Redeemer’s kingdom, which shall not be freely imparted unto him: and not in this world only, but also in the world to come. Every subject of the Redeemer’s kingdom shall himself be made a king. He must fight indeed as “a good soldier of Jesus Christ:” but victory shall surely be secured to him; and, having overcome his spiritual enemies, he shall be a partaker of his Saviour’s glory, and “sit down with him upon his throne, even as he also overcame and is set down with his Father upon his throne.” Such is the kingdom of God, as it was preached by St. Paul^l; and to a participation of it I invite every soul that hears me this day.]

^f Col. ii. 15. ^g Eph. iv. 8. ^h Rom. xi. 15.

ⁱ Eph. ii. 12, 13. ^k Eph. ii. 19. ^l Acts xx. 25. and xxviii. 31.

Now then LEARN,

1. What evidence there is of our commission—

[You may well inquire what authority we have to declare these things; and expect that we should be able to adduce some testimony from God himself, as a seal to our ministry. Behold then, *in a spiritual sense*, the very testimonies with which the Apostles themselves were honoured. Did they “heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out devils^m?” Such are the effects wrought by our Gospel also, on *the souls* of men. Say, brethren, Are there none of you that were once sick, and leprous, yea, “dead in trespasses and sins,” and “led captive by the devil at his will;” and that have, through the ministry of the word, been “delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Sonⁿ?” I trust that there are amongst you such “seals to our ministry^o,” and such witnesses for God in this sinful world. But where are these effects ever produced by any other doctrine than that which is here announced? Where are men “turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God,” by any other doctrine than that which Paul preached, the doctrine of the Cross? If, then, this doctrine have wrought effectually amongst you, and be the only doctrine which is the power of God to the salvation of men, then have you an evidence that “the kingdom of God is come unto you^p.”]

2. What benefit you will derive from receiving our testimony—

[Form to yourselves an idea of all that the wisest and greatest monarch can bestow upon his most endeared favourites, and you will fall infinitely short of what the Lord Jesus will confer on you — — —]

3. What necessity is laid upon you to submit to Christ—

[If those who slighted the ministrations of the Apostles, who could only say that the kingdom of heaven was *at hand*, were in a state “more intolerable than that of Sodom and Gomorrah^q,” what think you must be the state of those who pour contempt upon it now that it is established? I pray God, my brethren, that this guilt may never attach to you; lest, in the last day, the Saviour himself issue respecting you that awful sentence, “Bring hither those that were mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me.”]

^m ver. 8.

ⁿ Col. i. 13.

^o 1 Cor. ix. 2.

^p Matt. xii. 28.

^q ver. 15.

MCCCXLII.

DIFFUSION OF THE GOSPEL, A DUTY.

Matt. x. 8. *Freely ye have received, freely give.*

COMPASSION for the wants and miseries of men is a very distinguished feature of the Christian character. It is a lovely grace, even when it has respect only to the temporal necessities of mankind: but it is of a far higher stamp, when it is called forth by a view of their spiritual wants, and seeks to administer to their eternal welfare. Such was the feeling which our blessed Lord and Saviour chiefly manifested on the occasion before us, and sought to diffuse amongst those who were to be his more immediate followers and servants: "When he saw the multitudes," we are told, "he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd. Then said he unto his Disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest^a." Then having, on the following day, called his twelve Apostles, he bade them go out and preach, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand;" and, in confirmation of their word, to work the most benevolent miracles; that so the people might have, in the healing of their bodily disorders, an emblem and a pledge of what He was come to effect upon their souls^b. Then, reminding them how sovereignly he had acted in selecting them to this high office, he added, "Freely ye have received; freely give."

This direction of his to the Apostles will afford me a fit occasion to set before you,

I. The blessings which God has freely communicated to us—

Those which had been conferred upon the Apostles were great—

[The Apostles had been called, from their several occupations, to wait upon their Lord; and had been drawn with a

^a Matt. ix. 36—38.

^b ver. 7, 8.

power which they were not able to withstand. They had been selected from all the people of Israel, to be more especially instructed by their Lord in the nature of his religion, which he was about to establish: for to them did our Lord explain in secret the truths which he had delivered only in parables to his public auditories. To them also was given an experience of what they knew, by an operation of divine grace upon their souls; and an authority also was vested in them, to proclaim to others the truths which had been so far revealed to themselves. They were empowered, also, to work the most astonishing miracles in confirmation of their word: and, ultimately, to become instructors, yea, and instruments of salvation also, to millions of the human race. Finally, their names were written in the Lamb's book of life; and they were taught to look forward to all the felicity of heaven, as their sure and everlasting inheritance. No one of these things had they merited: no one of these things had they purchased or procured to themselves: all these blessings, whether *official* or *personal*, had been freely given to them, as an act of sovereign grace on the part of their Lord and Saviour: and, in reference to every one of the mercies, our Lord could say, "Ye have not chosen me; but I have chosen you^c."]

Nor are the blessings which have been vouchsafed to us less worthy of notice—

[True, we are not called to be Apostles, or to receive truth by inspiration, or to work miracles: but if we fall short of them in what relates to their *official* character, we are not a whit below them in all that is *personal*. "To us it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven;" whilst the great mass of mankind are yet lying in heathen darkness, without so much as one ray of light to guide them into the way of peace. I may add, too, that a faithful ministration of the Gospel is no small mercy, of which millions of those who possess the Christian Scriptures are yet destitute. But what, if we can say that our eyes have been opened to behold the truth, and our hearts opened to embrace it? What, if we can say that we have been "quickened from our death in trespasses and sins;" and that we have been enabled to give up ourselves to Christ, as his stated and avowed followers? What, if we have a good hope that "our names are written in heaven;" and that we have been "begotten again to an inheritance that is incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us?" Have not we reason to bless our God?

Then, as to the freeness of these gifts; what have we ever done to merit them? Must we not acknowledge, in reference

^c John xv. 16.

to every one of them, that God has *prevented* us with the blessings of his goodness? and that, in reference to them all, “He was found of them that sought him not, and made known to them that inquired not after him^d?”

Know ye then, brethren, that as to the *external ministration* of the Gospel, it is what “ye have freely received;” and if ye have been made partakers of *an inward experience of its power*, for that also ye are altogether indebted to the free and sovereign grace of God.]

Let us, then, proceed to consider,

II. The obligation which he has thereby entailed upon us—

The Apostles received not their gifts for themselves only, but for the good of others: and in like manner must we consider the benefits which we have received, as talents to be improved by us for the honour of our God, and the welfare of our fellow-creatures. This is true, even in relation to our faculties, our property, our influence in the world; but much more is it true in reference to the possession of divine knowledge, which is so distinguishing a mercy, and of such infinite importance to every child of man. To all, then, I say, “Freely give;” for,

1. The call on us is as urgent as it was on the Apostles—

[Were the bulk of the Jewish nation ignorant; what must the heathen be, who possess not one of their advantages? Cast an eye over a map of the globe, and see how small a part of the world is enlightened with divine truth. Not so much as the very name of Jesus is known to more than one-sixth part of the world; or, if known, is known only to be hated and abhorred. Go through the world, as the Apostles went through Judæa, and say whether you will not find the souls of men diseased and leprous, and under the power of Satan, as much as ever their bodies were whom the Apostles were authorized and empowered to heal. Yes, verily, “the whole world lieth in wickedness,” and “under the power of the Wicked-one^e;” and it is the Gospel only that can heal them. I therefore call upon you to send forth the Gospel, by any means in your power. Individually, I well know, you can do but little; but in concert you may do much. What might not the Christian world effect, if they all felt their obligations to the extent that they ought, and laboured to fulfil them to the extent that they might?

^d Isai. lxxv. 1. with Rom. x. 20.

^e ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ.

At all events, do *ye* rise to the call of duty ; and give as liberally as *ye* have freely received.]

2. The obligation, too, is as great on us as on them—

[We are not to “hide our talent in a napkin:” or, if we do, we must expect to be condemned as “unprofitable servants.” We must give an account of our stewardship, and answer for every talent committed to our charge. On the score of responsibility, therefore, we are as much bound to exert ourselves as ever the Apostles were. But I am ashamed to urge such an argument as that. Shall those who have been redeemed by the blood of God’s only dear Son, and been renewed by his Holy Spirit, want any other motive to exertion than gratitude, especially when called to such a service as this? Should not “the love of Christ constrain them” to do all that they can in this blessed work? Let me hope that you need no other impulse than this; and that now, with one heart and one hand, you will combine in aiding the society whose cause I plead.]

3. The opportunity, also, is as favourable as ever theirs was—

[Was there at that time an expectation of the Messiah’s advent? So is there now, to a vast extent, both amongst Jews and Gentiles. An idea seems to be pervading gradually the whole world, that one great religion is about to be established, to which all others will give way. And the Christian world, in particular, is beginning, and to an extent never known before, to feel its obligations, and to fulfil its duties in this respect. The diffusion of the Holy Scriptures in the different languages of the earth; the sending out of missionaries from almost every different church in Christendom; the zeal that is spread amongst all classes of society; and the liberality that is exercised; all augur well respecting the success of our endeavours: for, beyond all doubt, this zeal and liberality proceed from God: and what he has thus been pleased to excite, we may reasonably hope he will accompany with his blessing^f.]

^f This being preached in behalf of the Missions of the United Brethren, called Moravians, it was here shewn, that they have claims upon us of no ordinary kind: they are an Episcopal Church, like ourselves: they have, amongst Protestants, taken the lead in the establishment of Missions, and are universally acknowledged as the brightest patterns of Missionary exertions: they have selected the places most difficult of access (Greenland—the Coast of Labrador—the North-American Indians and Cherokees—the West-Indian Islands, among the Negroes—the Calmucs in Russian Asia—the Hottentots at the Cape, &c.) Their self-denial has been great, like that of the Apostles, ver. 8—10: their preaching simple, (the cross

of Christ) like theirs, ver. 7 : their success wonderful ; (twenty-eight thousand in the West Indies and two thousand among the Hottentots, besides thousands elsewhere) ; so that *the number of their converts exceeds that of the members of their own communion* : their necessities urgent, for their own people are poor, and not able to raise more than one fourth of their annual expenditure ; and their economy most remarkable ; for, with thirty-three stations, and one hundred and seventy Missionaries, including their wives, they expend only 8000*l.* a year. Are not such persons deserving of the aid of every Christian Church ?

MCCCXLIII.

WISDOM AND INNOCENCE TO BE UNITED.

Matt. x. 16. *Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves : be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.*

IT is a favourite idea with many, that a great part of the Scriptures was written for those only of the Apostolic age ; and that it is improper for us to apply to ourselves what was delivered to them. Now we readily grant that some things had a peculiar and primary reference to the Apostles, and to others of that day ; and that, *as far as any thing was peculiar to them*, it would be wrong for us to take it to ourselves : but we must assert, on the other hand, that *as far as we are in the same circumstances with them*, what was spoken to them is strictly and properly applicable to us. What was delivered to the Apostles themselves in this address of our Lord, was only partially applicable to them at the time it was spoken. The foregoing part of the chapter was suited to them in their first mission through the land ; but what is contained in our text and to the end of the chapter was comparatively inapplicable to them till after the day of Pentecost : yet, *as far as circumstances required it*, they were to regard it from the first moment that it was spoken to them. Thus then it is with us : every word of God, to whomsoever delivered, is to be considered as intended for us, in proportion as our situations accord with theirs to whom it was delivered. Accordingly we do not hesitate to take to ourselves the direction in our text : nor is it to ministers only

that we would apply it, but to Christians in general, whose situation in the world so far accords with that of the Apostles, that they universally need the same warning to be given them, and the same path of duty to be pointed out.

We shall proceed to notice then,

I. The situation of Christians in the world—

It may seem harsh to represent them as “sheep in the midst of wolves:” and we will grant that the general establishment of Christianity, and the laws enacted for the support of it, afford a protection to us which the first Christians did not enjoy; but the enmity of the human heart against God is the same as ever; and the light of Divine truth is as offensive to the carnal eye as ever; and the hostility which exists against true Christians at this day, is the same as existed in the heart of Cain, and of all ungodly men in every age; it is the same in its nature, and, when unrestrained by law, is the same also in its degree; it only differs in the particular acts by which it is evinced. The distinction of wolves and sheep still exists, though the power of the wolves is restrained: but what St. Paul says in reference to Ishmael is still as true as ever, “*As then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.*”

In confirmation of this, we appeal to the manner in which the godly are universally treated:

1. An universal prejudice exists against them—

[Names of reproach are given them now, as much as in any age of the world. These names vary from time to time; but they are constantly understood to designate persons that are weak and contemptible; and men universally affix a stigma to the character that is branded with them. Let any person, however respectable in himself, and however excellent in his deportment, be spoken of as a Methodist, (or any other name of like import,) and every one will conceive him to be either a weak enthusiast or a designing hypocrite: every thing that can be spoken to his disadvantage will be boldly asserted, eagerly listened to, and readily believed; nor will one single person in ever so large a company be found bold enough to vindicate his injured character. If a fault can be found in him, it will be

magnified beyond all bounds: what he has done once or twice in his life, will be represented as his daily practice: and the faults of one will be imputed to the whole body: nor can a wolf more delight in the blood of a lamb, than these do in tearing to pieces the characters of the Lord's people. We appeal to all, whether this be not true? and whether there be not still as much reason as ever to say, "We know concerning this sect, that it is every where spoken against?"]

2. Their very character exposes them to injuries—

[It is well known to be an established principle with them, to suffer patiently, and not to avenge themselves; insomuch, that if a person professing godliness should indulge an angry and vindictive spirit, he would be universally considered as having no pretensions to real piety. Hence every one is bold enough to insult or injure them: a man that would not dare to shew the smallest disrespect to a worldly character, will take liberties with them, and calumniate them without fear. As the defenceless condition of the sheep invites the wolf, whose ferocity would be curbed in the presence of a lion, so a cowardly principle operates on the world, and instigates them to attack those from whom they expect no vindictive retaliation.]

3. They are considered as the legitimate prey of all who choose to oppress them—

[It is well said by the prophet, "He that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey." Let any other respectable person be calumniated, and he will find some one to espouse his cause; but, as we before observed, the religious man has no advocate; every one has a right to say of him whatever he pleases. Let any other *order* of men be loaded with opprobrium, and multitudes will start up in their defence: yea, even a word that can bear an interpretation unfavourable to them, will be construed into a libel: but ten thousand words, the most harsh, the most cruel, and the most unjust, may be spoken against religious people; the whole order of them may be condemned as fools and hypocrites, and no one will feel himself offended, nor will any one complain of the uncharitableness of such censures. Whence then is this? Is it not, that these people are generally understood to be excluded in a measure from the common rights of men; and that every one has a right to attack them as he will? Let a disorderly man interrupt a public or private concert, and an universal indignation will be excited against him: but let him disturb a religious assembly in their public or social ordinances, and the world will be far more ready to vindicate than condemn him; or, at most, will only smile, as though he had committed but a slight and venial offence.

Do not these things shew, that religious people are not on

a footing of equality with others ; and that, in respect to such treatment, they are as sheep in the midst of wolves ? Yes, verily, it both is so, and must be so : “ The servant cannot be above his lord ; and, if they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household.”]

Let us now then consider,

II. The conduct which that situation calls for—

The serpent is said to be “ more subtle than all the beasts of the field :” and the dove is proverbially kind and innocent. Now the wisdom of the one and the harmlessness of the other are very desirable to be combined in the Christian character ; because it is by such an union only that the Christian will be enabled to cope successfully with his more powerful enemies.

He should unite these graces,

1. In the avoiding of evil—

[It is lawful and proper to avoid persecution, when we can do it without violating the laws of truth. The Apostles, “ when persecuted in one city, were directed to flee to another :” and that great champion of Christianity, St. Paul, when the Jews laid wait for him at the gates of Damascus, was “ let down by the wall in a basket,” that he might escape their fury. Our Lord himself too, when ensnaring questions were put to him, so that his answer, whatever it might be, would be made an occasion of accusation against him, repeatedly avoided the snare, sometimes by not answering at all, sometimes by a significant action, sometimes by asking a question in return : thus baffling the designs of his blood-thirsty enemies, and constraining them to say, “ Never man spake like this man.” In this way we may act also. We must not dissemble, like Peter, to please or satisfy any set of men whatever ; but we may take advantage of the peculiar views and prejudices of our enemies, to divide their counsels, and avert from ourselves their combined malignity. Thus did St. Paul, when the Pharisees and Sadducees were persecuting him with united fury : by professing himself a Pharisee, he engaged one half of his enemies on his side, and disconcerted the measures which would otherwise have been executed against him. There is danger, however, when on such ground as this, of violating Christian simplicity : it is safer far to take for our model the condescending kindness of the Apostle, in “ becoming all things to all men,” and in conforming ourselves to their habits and sentiments, wherever we can do it without violating the essential principles of the

Gospel. In this way we shall truly comply with the direction in our text, and make the enmity of others against Christianity an occasion of displaying its unrivalled excellence.]

2. In the doing of good—

[It is lamentable to see how often well-meaning Christians defeat their own purposes by their want of judgment. They will reprove sin; but they will reprove it with so much harshness, or in so public a manner, as to irritate only, and not to reclaim, the offender. In conveying instruction also, they overlook all the circumstances of time and place, as well as the state of those they address. They forget that there is much wisdom required “to win souls;” that they should “choose out acceptable words,” which shall “distil as the dew,” and insinuate themselves gently into the minds of the hearers: they will speak the truth freely at all times, without considering whether they be not “casting their pearls before swine, who will only turn again and rend them.” Some, as soon as they have attained a little knowledge themselves, will set themselves up for public teachers, and take upon themselves the office of the ministry without any call, either from God or man; little thinking what a stumbling-block they cast before many, whom they harden in their prejudices against the Gospel of Christ. In a word, they think that zeal is every thing; and that, if only they endeavour to do good, they need not be much concerned in what way they do it. But they need to be told, that Paul himself, even when going to meet the whole college of Apostles, took the precaution of communicating privately with the chief among them first, lest by an abrupt disclosure of all his history at once he should excite their prejudices, and occasion disorder in the Church^a: and it will be well for them to treasure up in their minds that observation of Solomon, “I wisdom dwell with prudence^b.”]

3. In the whole of their deportment—

[Christians should be “a wise and understanding people,” and should have their whole conduct regulated by “sound wisdom and discretion.” They should be careful “not to give occasion to their enemies to speak reproachfully.” They should rather be studious to “cut off occasion from those who seek occasion against them,” and to “put to silence the ignorance of foolish men by well-doing.” This is strongly inculcated in those words of the Apostle, “Walk in wisdom toward them that are without:” and it was admirably illustrated in the conduct of Daniel, which constrained his bitterest enemies to say, “We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel,

^a Gal. ii. 2.

^b Prov. viii. 12.

except we find it concerning the law of his God." With this view, therefore, we should avoid all needless singularities; we should cultivate a meek and courteous spirit; we should be especially attentive to all the duties of our calling, and should labour to "please all men for their good, to edification." In short, our determination through grace should be like that of the Psalmist, "I will walk wisely before thee in a perfect way."

We must however avoid every thing that savours of artifice and contrivance. There is an immense difference between carnal wisdom and that which is truly spiritual: there is a frankness and godly sincerity in the Christian's character which abhors all deceit and cunning. St. Paul distinguishes them in that advice of his, "I would have you wise unto that which is good, but *simple* concerning evil^c:" and in his own example he observed that distinction with undeviating, unremitting care^d.]

To assist you in the execution of these arduous duties, we subjoin a few DIRECTIONS:

1. Do not expect too much from man—

[You have been enabled perhaps to be "blameless and harmless, as sons of God, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation:" but do not therefore expect that the world will become your friends: if they "are at peace with you," it is as much as the Scripture authorizes you to hope for under the most favourable circumstances: the wolf must change its nature, before it can perfectly accord with the sheep. If wisdom and piety could have disarmed the world, Christ had never suffered. "To do well and to suffer for it," is all that you are to expect from man.]

2. Do not be grieved at the evil treatment that you meet with—

[If you suffer for righteousness' sake, you are rather to rejoice: it is a great honour conferred upon you, a testimony from God in your favour, a means of glorifying him before men, and of augmenting your own glory in a future world. Be not then cast down by your afflictions, but rather glorify God on this behalf.]

3. Guard against the risings of your own spirit—

[If others are wolves, you are still to be as sheep, meek and patient, even like Him who was "led as a sheep to the slaughter, and, as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so opened he not his mouth." "In your patience then possess ye your souls;" and "let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing."]

^c Rom. xvi. 19. ἀκερπαίους, the same word as in the text.

^d 2 Cor. i. 12. "Not with fleshly wisdom."

4. Look up to God for daily supplies of wisdom and grace—

[It is by the grace of God alone that we can do any good thing. If we attempt any thing in our own strength, we shall fail. But God has promised, “if any man lack wisdom or grace, and ask it of him, he will give him liberally and without upbraiding^c.” Beg of him, therefore, to give you such continued and abundant grace, that you may be enabled to “stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.”]

^c See Jam. i. 5. and Isai. xli. 10.

MCCCXLIV.

ENDURING UNTO THE END.

Matt. x. 22. *He that endureth to the end shall be saved.*

ONE cannot but admire the faithfulness of our blessed Lord, when calling his Disciples to follow him. It almost seems as if he intended rather to deter them from following him, since he forewarns them that such a step would inevitably bring upon them the heaviest trials from all around them. He goes so far as to tell them that they would be only “as sheep among wolves,” in danger every moment of being devoured by their enemies. And all the consolation he administers to them is taken from the hope of his presence here, and his glory hereafter. You will have to sustain all these things; “but he that endureth unto the end, the same shall be saved.” In these words we have,

I. A caution intimated—

It is evident that our Lord intended to tell them what they must expect to endure for his sake; and how much depended on their patient perseverance in well-doing.

They must experience great and heavy trials in their way to heaven—

[Much they would have to contend with *from within*—a carnal mind—a corrupt heart—a tempting world—a subtle adversary, whose devices are capable of beguiling the most wary soul: all these they would have, to obstruct their way to heaven; and all of them must be withstood, in order to a

successful issue of their labours — — — Many trials, also, they would meet with *from without*, insomuch that “their own dearest friends would become their bitterest enemies.” No other thing that could be done by them would give such general and inveterate offence as their adherence to him. They might become infidel, or licentious, and even profligate, and excite only *pity*; whereas their attachment to him would provoke the most embittered hostility; and not from the immoral only, but the moral also: yea, on the whole, the self-righteous moralists would be the fiercer enemies of the two: nor would imprisonment and death be too heavy penalties for them to expect at the hands even of their own parents or children.]

On their enduring of these to the end, would their everlasting salvation depend—

[It would be to no purpose for them to run well for a season, if they should stop before they reached the goal. They might suffer much and long, and yet perish, if they had not fortitude to sustain the utmost extremity of pain that could be inflicted on them. “If they would save their life, they must lose it: and on no other condition could they hope to save it to life eternal.” To this effect the Church has been warned in all ages. Lot’s wife was made a sad example of the danger of looking back, after she had escaped from Sodom; as the whole Jewish nation had been, after their deliverance from the land of Egypt^a. The Prophet Ezekiel, in particular, had warned the Jews, that a declension from the ways of godliness would infallibly involve them in ruin^b: and, in like manner, the Church in all ages is here warned by our Lord, that “then only will his followers be made partakers of his salvation, if they hold the beginning of their confidence firm unto the end^c.” “If any draw back, whatsoever be the occasion of that departure, it will be to inevitable and everlasting perdition^d.”]

But in my text there is, more directly and obviously,

II. An encouragement expressed—

“Salvation” is here declared to be the certain recompence of our fidelity—

[But who shall tell us what salvation is, even “that salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory?” Who can form any just idea of it? Who can inform us what it is to behold the Saviour face to face; and to be seated with him on his throne; and to enjoy the most intimate communion with him to all eternity? Who shall describe the blessedness of

^a Jude, ver. 5.

^b Ezek. xviii. 24.

^c Heb. iii. 14.

^d Heb. x. 38, 39.

heaven, and make us acquainted with the place, the company, the employment? Suffice it, however, to know, that the felicity of all the glorified saints shall be accorded to those who are conquerors in this glorious warfare^e — — —]

And will not that abundantly compensate for all that we can ever do or suffer for Christ?

[Our sufferings, be they ever so heavy, are, in fact, but short and light even in our present estimation, provided we are looking steadfastly to the “things which are invisible and eternal^f.” How light, then, will they appear, when once we come into the possession of that glory! Truly, if *now*, in the midst of all our trials, we say, that “the sufferings of this present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us^g,” much more shall we say so, when all our troubles shall have passed away, and all the fulness of heavenly blessing shall be poured into our souls — — —]

APPLICATION—

1. Let those who are just entering on the Christian course “first sit down and count the cost”—

[You well know how a man beginning to build a house, and relinquishing the work for want of funds to complete it, exposes himself to shame and ridicule amongst men. And to what shame will you be exposed in the presence of God, if, after having begun to follow Christ, you turn back, for want of fortitude to bear the cross which you had taken up for his sake! You must expect tribulation for his sake: you must expect persecution even unto death: and you must be “willing not only to be bound, but also to die for his sake.” At the same time, you may expect grace sufficient for you in the time of trial. Only look to Him, and depend on him; and he will never leave you, nor forsake you; “nor shall any temptation come upon you without a supply of grace equal to your day, or a way of escape, that you may be able to bear it^h.” *This* do then: put into one scale all that man can inflict on the body; and in the other, all that God can confer upon the soul, *in time*, to sustain you under your sufferings; and *in eternity*, to recompense you for them. *This* do, I say; and you need not fear but that, how numerous soever your enemies may be, you shall be “more than conquerors through Him who loved you.”]

2. Let all expect trials, “even to the end”—

[“Never are you to put off your armour,” till God gives you a discharge from this warfare. Satan, when repulsed in

^e Rev. iii. 5, 12, 21.

^f 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.

^g Rom. viii. 18.

^h 1 Cor. x. 13.

the wilderness, departed from our Lord "only for a season." At the close of our Saviour's life, that wicked adversary made his assaults more powerfully than ever. And so he may do with you. You may have a long intermission of trials, both within and without: but you never know what a single day may bring forth. Gird on, then, your armour daily, even the whole armour of God; and "war a good warfare" even to the end. When you first begin to follow Christ, you come to him as your only Saviour; and, professing to renounce every other ground of hope, you say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." You profess, also, to "live altogether by faith on him;" "receiving every thing out of his fulness," precisely "as the branch from the vine." *This*, then, is the course in which you are to continue. It is *this* which brings your trials upon you: it is because "you live godly in Christ Jesus, that you suffer persecution:" and by persevering in this path, you shall surely attain the promise in my text, "You shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation."]

3. Let all keep their eye fixed upon the heavenly prize—

[It was "to this that Moses looked, when he accounted the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt¹." And you, brethren, if you keep the felicity of heaven in view, will think little of the labour or the pains which you may endure in the acquisition of it. True, you must not look to it as what you are to *earn* by labour, or to *merit* by sufferings: you must look to it as the purchase of the Redeemer's blood, and as the gift of his grace. But still it will be accorded to those only who seek it in God's appointed way: and it is "through much tribulation only that you are to hope to attain it." If this appear formidable to flesh and blood, open the sacred volume, and see how others before you have triumphed, and how glorious the recompence will be when once it is attained. Survey the meridian sun for a few moments, and all earthly glory will appear dark: and get Pisgah views of the heavenly glory, and all earthly trials, how dark soever they may appear to the natural man, will have a splendour round about them, not unlike to the fiery furnace which was to preserve and sanctify the Hebrew youths, or like the fiery chariot which was to transport Elijah to the realms of bliss. In the near views of heaven, you will welcome either sufferings or death; and, like the first martyr Stephen, you will bless the murderers who are transmitting you to the full enjoyment of it.]

¹ Heb. xi. 26.

MCCCXLV.

THE DOCTRINE OF A PARTICULAR PROVIDENCE.

Matt. x. 30. *The very hairs of your head are all numbered.*

NONE are so ignorant amongst us as not to acknowledge *the existence* of a Supreme Being; but the extent of his agency, and the interest which he takes in the affairs of men, are by no means duly appreciated — — — We may judge however of this from the words before us; which we shall consider,

I. As a speculative truth—

To imagine a *general* Providence, and to deny or question his *particular* agency in every thing that occurs, is absurd in the extreme. The doctrine of a *particular* Providence is fully confirmed,

1. By reason—

[If there be any thing in the universe which God does not inspect and control, *there can be no dependence on prophecy*; for untoward and unlooked-for circumstances may occur to thwart the purposes of God. Suppose, for instance, that God had intended the murderous designs of Haman to take effect: the little accidental circumstance of Ahasuerus not being able to sleep one night, and of his calling for the records of his kingdom to amuse him, and of their being opened at one particular part, gave an unexpected turn to events, and disappointed the purposes of Heaven. But, if all these things were ordered of the Lord, then were the most minute things, that can be imagined, under his control, and subservient to the accomplishment of his will — — —

Again: if there be any thing really fortuitous and unforeseen by God, *He cannot be fit to govern the world*. He cannot be omniscient; because he will gather information from accidental circumstances that were independent of him. He cannot be omnipotent; because there will be some things over which he has no control. In a word, He cannot be God; because he will want all those attributes which are essential to a perfect Being. He will be weak and mutable; and will change with events, as we do. But, if all things be “ordered according to the counsel of his will,” then is He every way fit both to govern and to judge the world — — —]

2. By Scripture—

[The Scriptures uniformly represent Jehovah as “doing according to his will, in the armies of heaven, and amongst the

inhabitants of the earth." All creatures are alike subject to his control, rational and irrational, animate and inanimate. The angels in heaven, and men on earth, and devils in hell, all do his will^a — — — The sun, moon, and stars move or stand at his command^b — — — The elements exert or suspend their accustomed operations^c — — — The brute creation, beasts, birds, fishes, all move and act agreeably to his will^d — — — There is neither good nor evil, which is not done by him^e. Even *moral* evil is so far under his control, that, though he is not properly the author of it, it infallibly accomplishes his secret counsel, and his determined purpose^f — — — It is clear, then, to the full extent of the assertion in my text, that "not a sparrow falls to the ground without him; and that the very hairs of our head are all numbered."]

Let us next view the text,

II. As a consolatory declaration—

It speaks the richest encouragement,

1. To ministers—

[Their trials and difficulties are great; as our Lord in the context has forewarned us. But, how great or numerous soever they may be, there is not one that can come upon us but by His appointment, or press more heavily than He sees fit to permit, nor operate but for the advancement of His glory and our greatest good^g. We have only to look to Him, and depend on Him; and he will give us all the protection, support, and consolation, that we can possibly stand in need of. If the very hairs of our head are numbered, what shall we not be ready to encounter for Him, or to sustain in the execution of our high office? — — —]

2. To the Church at large—

[Every one has his own peculiar trials: but the declaration in our text is equally applicable to them all: and *that*, realized in the mind, is abundantly sufficient to carry us through all and make us triumphant over all. Let every one call to mind his own peculiar temptations — — — and apply to himself the text, as if he were the only individual to whom it was addressed: and then let him go on his way, saying, "If God be for me, who can be against me?"]

With such a word for our SUPPORT,

1. Let us give ourselves up unfeignedly to God—

^a Ps. ciii. 20. Prov. xxi. 1. Job i. 12. and ii. 6. Luke viii. 32.

^b Josh. x. 12.

^c Exod. xiv. 22, 27. Dan. iii. 27.

^d Dan. vi. 22, 24. 1 Kings xvii. 6. Jonah i. 17. ^e Amos iii. 6.

^f Gen. xlv. 8. Acts ii. 23. and iv. 28.

^g Rom. viii. 28.

[It is only when we belong to Christ, that we can derive full comfort from the declaration before us. We must be God's people, if we would have him for our God. The duty and the privilege must go hand in hand — — —]

2. Let us serve our God cheerfully, and with our whole hearts—

[Let no call of duty be thought too hard, no service too difficult, no danger too great. Only let us realize in our minds the passage before us, and rest assured, that "our strength shall be according to our day," and "our reward according to our labour^h."]

^h 1 Cor. iii. 8.

MCCCXLVI.

THE RULE OF CHRIST'S PROCEDURE IN THE LAST DAY.

Matt. x. 32—39. *Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven. Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.*

TO stand up in the place of Jehovah, and to declare his word to men, is so awful and arduous an office, that the greatest of all the Apostles was constrained to say, "Who is sufficient for these things?" But, if it be so arduous under any, even the most favourable, circumstances, what must it be when we are called to utter such solemn and weighty truths as those which we have just heard? We would never forget that the word of God is delivered in terms that are broad and general; and that the modification of those terms, or the application of them to all the different circumstances that may occur, requires much caution,

much wisdom, much discretion, lest, by too strong an enforcement of them, we “make the heart of the righteous sad;” or, by too lax an application of them, we make void the declarations of Heaven, and deceive men to their eternal ruin. May God enable us to discriminate aright, whilst, with a just mixture of tenderness and fidelity, we call your attention to the *rule of Christ’s procedure with his people in the last day*; which rule is here *stated, vindicated, confirmed*.

See it,

I. Stated—

The Lord Jesus requires that we confess him before men—

[It is not a mere assent to his religion, as true, that he requires: he calls us to embrace it with our whole hearts, and to let all men see our attachment to Him who is the founder of it. We must never be ashamed to acknowledge, that all our hope of acceptance with God is founded on his meritorious atonement; and that from Him, even from the fulness which God has treasured up for us in Him, we receive all the grace and all the strength whereby we are enabled to fulfil his will. We must avowedly take his word as the exclusive rule of our conduct; and not be afraid to declare, that the same is obligatory upon every soul of man. We must be as lights in a dark world: and must so walk, that all men may read in our conduct, as in a written epistle, what is the whole of his will concerning us^a. On no account are we to “put our light under a bed, or under a bushel; but to set it on a candlestick,” that all may see it, and be enlightened by it. No consideration whatever should induce us to “deny him” in any wise. If shame, or loss, or suffering, attach to a confession of him, we must not yield to intimidation, or be prevailed upon, for a single moment, to dissemble our attachment to him. Our love to him must be paramount to every personal consideration; and our zeal for his honour be sufficient to bear us up under all the trials and difficulties which we can be exposed to for his sake.]

According as we approve ourselves to him in this respect, will be his conduct towards us in the day of judgment—

[Those who have confessed him in this world, he will then confess before his heavenly Father. ‘These,’ he will say, ‘were my disciples indeed: they knew their duty to me;

^a 2 Cor. iii. 2, 3.

and they fulfilled it. I saw the trials to which they were called for my sake, and the fortitude with which they encountered all their difficulties; and therefore I say to them in thy presence, and before the whole assembled universe, "Well done, good and faithful servants; enter ye into the joy of your Lord."

But widely different will be his conduct towards those who have denied him. They will come before him, perhaps with confidence, claiming him as their Lord, whom they have served and honoured: but he will say to them, "'Depart from me; I never knew you," never approved you, in the midst of all your professions of regard for me^b. Father, I deny their title to the name of my disciples: I disclaim all interest in them, all connexion with them: "they were ashamed of me, and I am ashamed of them:" and my sentence respecting every one of them is, that they "depart accursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."']

Now, if this rule, as carried into execution thus, appear exceptionable to any of you, hear it,

II. Vindicated—

It may be complained of perhaps,

1. As unnecessary—

[Christianity, it may be said, is a religion of love, and is intended to produce nothing but harmony upon earth. Is not this the description given of its effects by the Prophet Isaiah: "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them?" How, then, shall such enmity be shewn against it, as shall tempt any man to deny his Lord? It is possible that such an effect might be produced, if it did not improve the characters of men: but its avowed tendency is, to change even the vilest of men into the very image of their God: how, then, can persons so changed become objects of scorn and hatred to those around them? The rule is plainly unnecessary, because there never can be any occasion for the execution of it: Christianity can produce nothing but peace: and therefore the supposition that any should ever be tempted by persecution to deny Christ is altogether vain.

But, specious as this objection is, it is not founded in truth: for though the *proper* tendency of Christ's religion is to diffuse peace and love, the *actual effect* of it is the very reverse. "Think not," says our Lord, "that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the

^b Matt. vii. 21—23.

daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law : and a man's foes shall be they of his own household." 'What!' it may be asked, 'was this really *the design* for which Christ came into the world?' No : but *this effect* is as universal and invariable as if it had been actually designed. And this may easily be accounted for. Wherever the Gospel works effectually on the heart, there a great and visible change is wrought : for the person that obeys it is "turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." This change cannot fail to attract the notice of his neighbours ; who are thereby reduced to the alternative of condemning it in the person changed, or of acknowledging the necessity of a similar change in themselves. But, not wishing to experience it themselves, they embrace the other alternative, and reprobate the change as enthusiastic and absurd. If the person so changed stand in any near relation to them, they feel it on that account the more offensive : because the odium attached to it is, in a measure, reflected on themselves ; and the self-condemnation, which they are constrained to feel, is far more acute than if the person exciting it had no connexion with them. Hence parents and relatives are generally amongst the fiercest opposers of such a change ; and "a man's greatest foes are usually those of his own household." Another reason for this is, that as those who are most nearly related to us possess a greater influence over us than others, they are the first persons looked to, to exert that influence, whether of authority or love, for the reclaiming of us from our supposed errors.

Hence then it appears, that the rule is by no means unnecessary ; since, if the world at large should forbear to shew their hatred of the change, a man's nearest relatives will be sure to lay all kinds of stumbling-blocks in his way, to keep him from confessing Christ, and to lead him to a denial of him.]

2. As unjust—

[It is here taken for granted, that the person rejected by this rule has never been guilty of any flagrant transgression ; and that his only offence has been, that he did not confess Christ so boldly as he ought to have done ; but, on some occasions, has rather denied him. Now, can it be supposed, that for such a slight offence as this the Lord Jesus will "deny," and everlastingly reject, "him?" Impossible : he can never inflict so severe a punishment for so trivial an offence.

But this objection has no real weight, as our Lord plainly shews us : "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me : and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." Let any man judge in this matter for himself. Can a person who,

from fear of his parents, or love to his children, proves unfaithful to his conscience, and violates his duty to his Lord, be worthy of Christ? Can the Lord Jesus Christ ever confess such an one before his Father, and say, 'Here is one who has served me faithfully, and is worthy of partaking with me in my kingdom and glory?' Must he not rather say, 'Here is one who feared and loved his earthly relatives more than me; and therefore must look for his reward from them; for he is unworthy of any recompence from me?' Again: supposing the person to maintain his steadfastness till matters came to the greatest extremity, and he were called, like the Roman criminals, to carry his cross, as our Lord and Saviour did, to the place of execution, in order to die upon it; still could he be deemed worthy of Christ if he drew back then? May not the Lord Jesus say to such an one, 'Wherefore hast thou drawn back? Did I not bear my cross for thee? Did I not come from heaven on purpose to bear it? Did I not bear it under circumstances ten thousand times more dreadful and appalling than any that thou wast ever called to encounter? And did I not do this for thee, when thou wast an enemy? Did I not drink to the very dregs the cup of bitterness, of which thou hast been called only to take the slightest taste? How, then, can I confess thee before my Father, when thou wouldest not endure such a transient pain for me? When thou hast loved thine own ease or interest more than me, how can I account thee worthy of my kingdom and glory? Thou art unworthy of me; and canst not but know that thou art so. Hadst thou "been faithful unto death, thou shouldst have had awarded to thee a crown of life:" but seeing thou hast turned back from me, my soul can have no pleasure in thee?' Who must not subscribe to such a sentence as this?]

This rule, thus fully vindicated by our Lord, is yet further,

III. Confirmed—

["He that findeth his life, shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake, shall find it." A person may imagine himself a gainer by avoiding persecution, and regarding his *present* interests. But, "what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" If but the life of the body were at stake, who would accept a momentary possession of the whole world in exchange for it? How much less, then, would any person act thus, when the everlasting welfare of his soul was to be the price of his transient enjoyment? On the other hand, Who does not submit to a momentary pain, when he is assured that it shall be productive of permanent and perfect ease? and how much more may any momentary sacrifice

be made in the assured prospect of eternal happiness and glory? Know, then, that this is the alternative set before you. You may not, indeed, be actually called to lay down your life for Christ; but you must be ready to do so at any moment, and in any manner that you may be called to do it: and if these terms appear too severe, nothing remains for you, but “everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.” If, on the contrary, you accept the Lord on these terms, even though you should be eventually required to lay down your life for his sake, you will be gainers in the issue; since “the sufferings of this present life, how severe or protracted soever they may be, are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.” Thus, “are life and death set before you.” Our blessed Lord has warned us, that “if any man come to him, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be his disciple^c.” Of course, we are not called *positively* to *hate* our relations, and our own life; but *comparatively* we are: and nothing under heaven, whether pleasing or painful, is to have any influence upon our minds in comparison of love to the Saviour’s name, and zeal for his glory.]

Lest, however, this subject should be in any wise misapprehended, let me add a few words of ADVICE—

1. Do not affect needless singularity—

[Piety will make you sufficiently singular, without distinguishing yourselves by any marks, which a hypocrite may assume as well as you. Be as eminent for *that* as you will: but in things that have no real connexion with vital godliness, I should rather recommend a conformity with those of the age and station to which you belong.]

2. Do not lay too great a stress on non-essential matters—

[There are some things which are essential to the maintenance of a good conscience before God: and these things must be done or forborne, according to the dictates of your own judgment. But there are many things which are really indifferent; and which may be either done or forborne, according to the views which different persons entertain respecting them. In reference to such things, endeavour to understand, and to maintain, your liberty. Only use not your own liberty to the endangering of another’s welfare; and neither judge those who allow themselves in a greater latitude than you, nor despise those who have not the same insight with you into the full liberty of the Gospel^d.]

^c Luke xiv. 26.

^d Rom. xiv. 3.

3. Be particularly attentive to your own spirit—

[You may be right in the line of conduct you pursue, and yet be highly criminal in respect to the spirit you indulge in pursuing it. A parent, for instance, will urge upon you a conformity to the world, in some things that are positively and intrinsically evil: and you do right in resisting his solicitations or commands; because “you must obey God rather than man.” But if you do it with petulance and disrespect, you sin against God: for no conduct on the part of your parent can absolve you from the duty of honouring him, even whilst the sinfulness of his injunctions prevents you from obeying him. A meek, humble, modest, and respectful deportment must be observed towards all persons, and under all circumstances. Every violation of this is decidedly and unquestionably wrong. Your duty is, to “shew *all* meekness to *all* men.”]

4. Take the word of God alone as your rule—

[Your friends will often bring before you the examples of different persons, as sanctioning this or that conduct. But men are no examples to you. You must go to the word and to the testimony; and be regulated only by Scripture-precepts, and Scripture-examples. If you adhere not to this standard, no one can tell whither you may be drawn. By complying with every thing that any reputed saint has ever done, you may be drawn into evils without end. Leave others to stand or fall to their own Master; and be you careful to approve yourselves to Him, whose judgment will determine your eternal state.]

5. Look up to God for strength to do his will—

[In the passage which our blessed Lord has quoted in our text, the Prophet teaches us to make this improvement of it. “The son dishonoureth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother; the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law: a man’s enemies are those of his own house. Therefore I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me^e.” Yes; your God will hear you: and how difficult soever you may find it, on some occasions, to hold fast your integrity, “His grace shall be sufficient for you:” and “you shall be able to do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth you.”]

^e Mic. vii. 6, 7.

MCCCXLVII.

CHRIST'S ANSWER TO JOHN'S DISCIPLES.

Matt. xi. 4—6. *Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are*

cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them; and blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.

IT has pleased God in every age so to deal with his most favoured servants as to shew, that though he had raised them up and qualified them for his service, he was not dependent on them, nor needed their labours for the support of his interests in the world. He has permitted many to languish on a bed of sickness, or to be immured in a prison, or to be cut off by an untimely death, when they might have been actively engaged in promoting his glory: and this circumstance has sometimes filled the weak and inexperienced with surprise. But it becomes all to submit with meekness even to his darkest dispensations, assured that, though clouds and darkness may be round about him, righteousness and judgment are the basis of his throne. We are persuaded that this was the frame of the Baptist's mind when shut up in prison, and apparently neglected by his Lord and Master. Some indeed imagine, that John was himself beginning to doubt whether Jesus were the Christ: but when we consider the miraculous attestations of it which he had received from heaven, and the many testimonies which he himself had borne to Christ, and the evidence which Christ daily gave of his Messiahship, and that there was no other person at that time existing as a rival of Christ, we cannot admit the idea that John's faith was at all shaken. But his disciples hearing of the wonderful miracles which Christ wrought, yet thinking that, if he were the Messiah, he would have shewn more regard for John, and used his almighty power to liberate him from prison, were much in doubt, and were therefore referred by their master to Jesus himself, in order to get all the satisfaction which they desired. To Jesus they came, and inquired whether *he* were the true Messiah or not: and our Lord, not choosing to let their faith rest on a mere verbal testimony from himself, gave them the fullest evidence of their senses, and cautioned them against yielding to the force of prejudice, or rejecting him on account of any circum-

stances which they could not altogether account for. His answer to them will naturally lead us to consider,

I. The grounds we have for faith in Christ—

There were two things to which our Lord appealed in proof of his divine mission:

1. The miracles he wrought—

[These were great and stupendous, wrought on the occasion, publicly, in the sight of these messengers; and they were of such a nature as did not admit of any confederacy or collusion — — — Nothing but a Divine power could have effected such things; and consequently they were unexceptionable testimonies from God himself that he was the true Messiah.

With the disciples of John these miracles must have had peculiar weight; for John, whom they regarded as their master, had wrought no miracle^a; whereas the miracles which they had just seen were precisely such as the Messiah was to perform: and the very same prophet who had spoken most plainly of John's office, as the forerunner of the Messiah, had specified these very works, as distinctive of the Messiah himself^b.

These works are still a standing proof that Christ was the promised Messiah: and the spiritual effects which are still wrought by his word, and which precisely correspond with those miracles, are yet further evidences of the same truth: for wherever the true Gospel is preached, there "the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up" to a new and heavenly life.]

2. The preaching of the Gospel to the poor—

[The philosophers of old addressed themselves only to the great and learned, whilst they wholly overlooked the lower classes of society; and even the prophets were sent principally to the kings and nobles of Israel: but our Lord addressed himself chiefly to the poor: he sought to benefit the meanest and the vilest of mankind. This of itself was a strong presumptive proof that he was the Messiah, because an impostor would rather have sought to gain over to his interests the great and powerful. But it was foretold that the Messiah should have peculiar respect to the poor in his ministrations^c, and that this regard for them should eminently distinguish his kingdom upon earth^d.

^a John x. 41.

^b Isai. xxxv. 4—6.

^c Compare Isai. lxi. 1. with Luke iv. 18. What is called "the meek" in the one place, is called "the poor" in the other.

^d Ps. lxxii. 2, 4, 12, 13.

This evidence also still exists, not merely as an historical fact, but as a matter of daily experience and observation: for it is universally true, wherever the Gospel is preached, that the poor are the people to whom the word is sent, and that they chiefly, though not exclusively, are benefited by it^e.]

But faith in Christ, notwithstanding these grounds, is not easy to be exercised; as will appear by considering,

II. The difficulties it has to surmount—

Our Lord himself intimates, as indeed the prophets had before declared^f, that he was likely to prove a stumbling-block to many: and it must be confessed that there were many things in him which were calculated to offend a carnal mind.

1. The meanness of his appearance—

[His birth and education as a carpenter, his abject condition, (without even a place where to lay his head,) the poverty of his attendants, together with the contempt poured upon him by all ranks and orders of men, were circumstances which must have been an occasion of stumbling to any one, but especially to those who had been taught to expect only a temporal king, and a triumphant Messiah. Let us only put ourselves in their place, and conceive of a poor carpenter, surrounded by a few illiterate fishermen, and professing himself to be the promised Messiah, the Saviour of the world; what should we think of such pretensions? Whatever miracles he wrought, we should be very slow of heart to believe in him, and very backward to become his acknowledged followers. Something of the same difficulty still exists; and it operates with great force upon the world at large. The followers of Jesus are still “a poor and afflicted people,” despised and hated for his name’s sake: and it is no easy matter to think that *they* are right, in opposition to the great and learned who reject him: we cannot endure to be told, that “what God has hid from the wise and prudent, he has revealed unto babes:” we are ready to reply, like those of old, “Have any of the rulers, or of the Pharisees, believed on him? But for this people, who knoweth not the law, they are cursed;” they are misguided, ignorant enthusiasts, wholly undeserving of any notice or regard.]

2. The mysteriousness of his doctrines—

[Poor and despised as he was, he professed to be in

^e 1 Cor. i. 26—28.

^f Isai. viii. 14, 15.

heaven whilst he was yet on earth; yea, to be one with the Father, and to know and do all that the Father himself either knew or did. He declared that he would give his life a ransom for the souls of men; that all must "eat his body and drink his blood," if they would be partakers of his salvation; and that as soon as ever they should eat his flesh and drink his blood, they should dwell in him, and he in them, and he would give them eternal life, and raise them up to the enjoyment of it at the last day.

Now these were "hard sayings," which they were not able to hear. And are they not hard sayings still? When we speak of a life of faith on the Son of God, of maintaining the most intimate fellowship with him, and receiving out of his fulness a constant supply of all spiritual blessings, are not these things deemed enthusiastic and absurd? Wherever these truths are insisted on with becoming energy, does not a considerable degree of reproach attach both to those who preach, and those who receive them? Yes; notwithstanding we profess ourselves followers of Christ, "the preaching of the cross is yet foolishness to us," till God himself has humbled us in the dust, and subdued our spirits to the obedience of faith.]

3. The self-denying nature of his precepts—

[The very first condition imposed on his disciples was, to "deny themselves, and take up their cross daily, and follow him." He shewed them by his own example what a superiority to every thing in this world he required, and told them plainly that they must be no more of the world than he was: and finally, he warned them, that he would acknowledge none as his disciples, unless they were truly willing, at any time and in any manner, to lay down their lives for him. How offensive these declarations and injunctions were to the carnal hearts of his hearers, we may judge by the conduct of the Rich Youth, who, though convinced in his judgment that Jesus was the Christ, could not prevail upon himself to follow him, but abandoned all his hope in Christ, rather than make the sacrifice that was demanded of him.

And what is it that at this day forms the principal ground of offence against the Gospel? It is the purity of its precepts. If only we would leave men at liberty to indulge their corrupt desires, and to retain their earthly and sensual dispositions, we might set forth the mysteries of the Gospel as strongly as we pleased: but, if we require from our hearers the mind that was in Christ Jesus, and a conformity to his heavenly example, we put a stumbling-block before them, which they fall over to their eternal ruin: they cannot, they will not endure to hear of such requisitions; and on account of their aversion to such restraints they reject the Gospel altogether.]

But that faith which is the gift of God will triumph over all: hence,

III. The commendation given it, when duly exercised—

To have the mind brought to a cordial acquiescence in all that is spoken of the Lord Jesus, is indeed a great victory; and blessed is that man who has attained it: for that acquiescence clearly shews,

1. That he is taught of God—

[It is impossible for the human mind, blinded as it is by innumerable lusts and prejudices, to see the truth and excellence of the Gospel, unless it have been first enlightened by the Holy Spirit; “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” When Peter confessed his Master to be “the Christ, the Son of the living God,” our Lord told him, that “flesh and blood had not taught him this, but that his heavenly Father had revealed it to him;” on which account he pronounced him truly blessed: “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona,” &c.: and at another time he pronounced all his disciples blessed on a similar account: “Blessed are your eyes, for ye see; and your ears, for ye hear.”]

2. That he is brought into the path of life—

[The man who exercises true and saving faith, must have “passed from death unto life;” for our Lord himself says, “This is life eternal, to know thee, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.” The change that has taken place in him is not in his understanding only, but his heart: he must have become a new creature: the same Divine operation that wrought faith in his heart, must have produced every other grace, according to the measure in which the gift of faith has been bestowed upon him. Having “received Christ Jesus the Lord, he has the privilege of being a child of God.” And is not *he* blessed? What man on earth has so much reason to rejoice as *he*? When some were ready to magnify the blessedness of our Lord’s mother on account of her having borne and nourished such a son, our Lord rectified their mistake, and taught them to consider every true believer as *more blessed* on account of his *spiritual* relation to him, than she was on account of her relation *according to the flesh*; “yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it.”]

3. That all the glory of heaven is his—

[Being born of God, he is born “to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in

heaven for him; and he shall be kept by the power of God, through faith," unto the everlasting possession of it. "The Lord will not forsake his people, because it hath pleased him to make them his people." Say then, is not *he* blessed that has such a Father, such a Friend, such a Protector, and such a portion? Truly he is blessed: and the Lord himself will ere long pronounce him so: "Come, thou blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for thee from the foundation of the world."]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who openly stumble at Christ—

[You think that because many learned persons deny the divinity of his person, and the expiatory power of his death, your rejection of him is excusable. But no such excuse was ever admitted for his enemies of old: nor will it ever be admitted for you. It was foretold that he should be "a rock of offence; and that *many* would stumble at him and fall:" but it was declared by our Lord himself, that "all who should fall on that stone, should be broken in pieces; and that on whomsoever it should fall, it would grind him to powder." Beware then how you justify your infidelity or attempt to extenuate its guilt; for the unalterable determination of God is, that "he who believeth not, shall not see life, but that the wrath of God shall abide upon him."]

2. Those who profess indeed to receive him, but are inwardly offended at him—

[It is to no purpose to receive his word in theory, whilst we practically deny its influence on our hearts. He himself says, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" Do not judge yourselves, therefore, by your professions, but by the manner in which you live upon him, and serve him. Whilst there is any one saying of his that appears hard to you, or any one commandment that is grievous, or any other attainment that is not ardently desired by you, your heart is not right with God; and Christ, in that particular, is an offence unto you. O "judge yourselves, that ye be not judged of the Lord."]

3. Those to whom Christ is altogether precious—

[To those who truly believe, he is precious: his person, his office, his character, his word, his dispensations, all are precious; yea, "he is altogether lovely." And what shall I say unto you? What more suitable than the angel's address to Mary? "Blessed are ye among men; ye are highly favoured of the Lord." You have within yourselves the evidence that Christ is "he that was to come;" and you have no occasion,

or disposition, to “look for any other.” If ye are “poor,” adore his name that “his Gospel has been preached to you,” and that you have not heard it in vain. Adore your heavenly Father too, who hath “chosen the poor of this world, to be rich in faith and heirs of his kingdom.” If, on the other hand, ye be among the rich, you have, if possible, still greater reason to adore the riches of his grace, for distinguishing you thus from the great mass of those who reject him, and for bringing you into his kingdom, notwithstanding all the difficulties which your wealth has interposed to obstruct your entrance. Labour then, with your more numerous talents, to bring more honour to him, and to evince to all around you, that his grace is still as efficacious to heal the diseases of the soul, as ever his word was to heal the diseases of the body. The various persons whom he healed or raised from the dead were witnesses for him in every place: be ye the same; and let the whole of your spirit and conduct approve itself to the world as his workmanship: so shall ye be truly blessed both in time and in eternity.

MCCCXLVIII.

CHRIST'S COMMENDATION OF JOHN.

Matt. xi. 11, 12. *Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.*

OUR blessed Lord lost no opportunity of encouraging persons to believe on him. He had forbore to applaud the character of John whilst John was bearing testimony to him, lest it should be thought that there was a concerted plan between them to exalt each other: but, when John was now shut up in prison, and come near to the close of his ministry, our Lord bore testimony to him in the most exalted terms. The people had flocked from every quarter to hear John: and our Lord asked them, what sort of a person they had expected to hear and see: they had not travelled so far to see a fickle man, like a reed shaken with the wind, or a soft effeminate man, like those often bred in courts; but a prophet, who, with self-denying labour and unshaken steadfastness,

was instructing and reforming the land: and such indeed he was, even like Elijah of old, whose spirit and character he bore, agreeably to the prophetic representation that had been given of him four hundred years before. Yet eminent as John was, even greater than any prophet that had ever lived, our Lord told his hearers, that the least of his true disciples was really greater than the Baptist himself.

Many interpret this as referring only to those who should preach his Gospel; but though it is true that the Apostles were superior to John in their office, and should far exceed him in the success of their labours, we see no reason for limiting to *them* what was spoken to *the whole multitude*: we are persuaded, on the contrary, that this information was intended for the encouragement of *all*, and as an incentive to them to follow him, with the same avidity and zeal as they had manifested in following John.

Considering the passage thus as referring to all true Christians, we shall take occasion from it to point out,

I. Their pre-eminent advantages—

John was greater than all that had ever been born of woman, not in sanctity (for Daniel, and perhaps several others, were not a whit inferior to him in this respect,) but in office; being the forerunner of the Messiah, who did not merely speak of him at a distance, but pointed him out as present; and declared him to be that very “Lamb of God that should take away the sins of the world.” But the least in the Messiah’s kingdom, which was just then founded upon earth, are greater than he, inasmuch as they have,

1. A fuller discovery of Christ’s character—

[John himself, and indeed the Apostles too, till after the resurrection, had very imperfect views of Christ: they saw not, or saw but very faintly, the dignity of his person, the necessity of his death, the certainty of his resurrection, or the nature of his kingdom: but the most ignorant of Christ’s disciples have a comparatively clear, enlarged, and certain knowledge of him: they know what God has revealed concerning his *person*, as Emmanuel, God with us; his *work*, as fulfilling and satisfying the law for us; and his *offices*, as the Prophet, Priest, and

King of his Church and people — — — In this they are as superior to John, as John was to the least enlightened of all the ancient prophets.]

2. A richer experience of his love—

[They can tell, not merely what he *is to do*, but what he *has done*: yea, they can say, “He has loved *me*, and given himself for *me*.” They have felt *the virtue of his blood* in purging their consciences from guilt, and *the efficacy of his grace* in subduing their most inveterate corruptions. They know what it is to receive out of his fulness the blessings which they need, and to maintain sweet fellowship with him from day to day. They have within themselves the evidence that he is a living, a gracious, and an almighty Saviour, who fulfils to them all his promises, guides them by his Spirit, upholds them by his arm, sanctifies them by his grace, comforts them with his presence, and renders them meet for the enjoyment of his heavenly kingdom — — — In this their superiority to the Baptist is as the meridian sun to the early dawn.]

The ministry of John was as remarkable as his endowments. As he had clearer views than all who preceded him, so was the success of his labours incomparably greater: for almost the whole of Judæa, and even of the people beyond Jordan, came and were baptized of him^a. Even those who were the most remote from the kingdom of heaven, according to human apprehensions, were the foremost to seek admission into it, and to take it, as it were, from those, who, from their education and professions, seemed most likely to become the subjects of it^b. In this conduct of theirs we may see a lively image of the followers of Christ, and may read,

II. Their universal character—

Whilst they approve themselves the Lord’s people by their views of his salvation, they manifest in relation to it,

1. A fixed purpose—

[They regard the care of the soul as the one thing needful: other things may be good and useful; but this is necessary: it cannot be dispensed with for a single day: nor will any

^a Matt. iii. 5, 6. Luke xvi. 16.

^b This is the sense in which many understand the latter verse of our text. Compare Luke vii. 28—30. Matt. xxi. 31, 32.

thing be tolerated that would interfere with it. Allurements or menaces are alike disregarded by them: no menace is terrible to them in comparison of God's displeasure; no pleasure is desirable in comparison of his favour. Hence, if tempted, they reply, What shall it profit me to gain the whole world and lose my own soul? And, if threatened, they answer, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." In a word, they readily part with all to obtain the pearl of great price; and having "bought the truth," nothing under heaven can induce them to sell it. As in a race the persons contending for the prize may easily be distinguished from the spectators by the earnestness with which they pursue their object, so may these be known amidst a supine and thoughtless generation: they are lights shining in the midst of a dark, benighted world."]

2. A persevering endeavour—

[Having put their hand to the plough, they will not look back again. They know that they must "endure unto the end, if ever they would be saved;" and they wait upon God in prayer, and beg him to perfect that which concerneth them. They now desire, not merely to be saved from death and hell, but to have Christ dwelling and reigning in them: nor will they ever be satisfied till "every thought of their hearts is brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." Hence their diligence in reading the word, and in every ordinance of religion, whether public or private. They find enemies both without and within: but they will not yield to discouragement. They know that their Redeemer is mighty, and able to save them to the uttermost; and therefore they go forth in his strength, and, though defeated, rally; though wounded, fight; though faint, pursue; and never put off their armour till they are made more than conquerors.]

ADDRESS—

1. The ignorant Christian—

[Wherein are you superior to John and all the prophets? Truly you are less than heathens, because of your neglect of your superior advantages——Remember that God will "take vengeance on them that know him not, and that obey not his Gospel."]

2. The formal Christian—

[You value yourselves on your moderation: and, if there be a person striving to take the kingdom by violence, you discourage him. You approve of violence in every thing else; and disapprove of it where alone it should be used——Did you never hear that "many *seek* to enter into heaven, but fail,"

because they do not *strive*? Beware lest that be your unhappy case.]

3. The fainting Christian—

[Be not weary in well doing. You have many difficulties, it is true; but you have omnipotence on your side: and “if God be for you, who can be against you?” The temptations you have, may seem peculiar to you; but they are only “such as are common to man:” and God engages that you shall have “none without a way to escape” from it, or strength to withstand it. “Be strong then in the Lord, and in the power of his might.”

But beware of sloth: *that* will soon enervate the soul, and paralyse every effort in the way to heaven. The promises of God and the assistances of his Spirit do not supersede your own exertions: it is true at this day, as much as in the days of Christ, that “the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent must take it by force.”]

MCCCXLIX.

THE HEAVY-LADEN INVITED TO CHRIST.

Matt. xi. 28. *Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.*

IT is thought by many, that the Gospel is a mere system of notions, which may be received without benefit, or rejected without loss. But it is rather proposed to us as a remedy for all the miseries, which sin has brought into the world. In it we are represented as guilty and undone: but Christ is set before us as a Saviour, and is exhibited under every figure that can unfold his excellency, or endear him to our souls. Under the Old Testament, he is shadowed forth as a brazen serpent to heal the wounded, as a city of refuge to protect the man-slayer, and as a sacrifice to remove the sinner's guilt. In the New Testament, he speaks of himself as bread for the hungry, as living water for the thirsty, as a physician for the sick, and, to mention no more, as a kind and hospitable friend, who invites to him the weary and heavy-laden.

In the words here addressed to us, we may notice,
I. The characters invited—

Under the description of the weary and heavy-laden we must certainly include those, who groaned under the burthen of *the Mosaic law*—

[The ceremonial law required a great multitude of ritual observances, which, to those who saw not their typical use and tendency, must have appeared frivolous and arbitrary; and, even to those who had some insight into their meaning, they were an irksome task, and an intolerable burthen. From this yoke however the Messiah was to deliver them; he was to annul the old covenant with all its ceremonies, and to establish a better covenant in its stead^a. When therefore our Lord proclaimed himself to be the Messiah, he invited to him all that were weary and heavy-laden with the Mosaic law, and assured them, that the yoke which he would impose upon them was light and easy.]

There is however a further reference to those who laboured under *temporal afflictions*—

[None are such strangers to the common lot of mortality, as not to know that mankind are subject to many grievous troubles. Indeed, such are the calamities incident to life, that few, who have been long in the world, can cordially “thank God for their creation.” But more especially when the hand of God is heavy upon us, and we feel the weight of great and multiplied afflictions, we are ready to hate our very existence, and to “choose strangling rather than life.” Many probably of those, to whom Jesus addressed himself, had drunk deep of the cup of sorrow: for their encouragement therefore he promised that, whatever their trials were, whether in mind, or body, or estate, if only they would come to him, they should find a relief from all, or (what would be of equal value) support and comfort under their pressure.]

But doubtless we must principally understand by these terms those who are oppressed with *a sense of sin*—

[Though all are sinners, all do not feel the weight of sin, because they know not what tremendous evils it has brought upon them. But *when any are awakened* from their lethargic state, and see what a good and holy God they have offended, they begin to tremble, lest the wrath of God should break forth upon them to consume them utterly. Perhaps they obtain a transient peace *by means of* their repentance and reformation; but their *subsequent falls* and backslidings rend open the wounds afresh, and make them feel how hopeless

^a Heb. viii. 8, 13.

their condition must be, if they be left to themselves. Even after they have attained peace through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus, so that they no longer tremble for fear of condemnation, they groan more than ever *under* the burthen of their *indwelling corruptions*, saying, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me^b?" These are the persons for whose relief our Lord came into the world, and whom, above all, he invited to him in the words before us.]

To ascertain more fully the import of his address, we proceed to consider,

II. The invitation itself—

By the expression, "Come unto me," our Lord could not mean to call them nearer to him, because they were already round about him: but as he himself explains the words, he called them to believe on him^c; or, in other words, to come to him in the exercise of *faith*, of *hope*, and of *love*.

Its import will best appear in a short paraphrase—

['To impart rest unto you all is the great end of my appearance in the world. Seek it therefore in me, and come to me, that ye may receive it at my hands. Turn not away from me as an impostor; for I am the very person referred to in your prophecies, and sent unto you by the Father. Go not any longer to the vanities of this world in search of rest; for it is not in them; it is a gift which none but myself can impart unto you. Keep not back, from an apprehension that you can make satisfaction for your own sins, or cleanse yourselves from your iniquities: for you can never have redemption, but through my blood; nor can you ever subdue your lusts, but by my all-sufficient grace. Neither delay your coming on account of your own unworthiness, as if it were necessary for you to bring some meritorious services as the price of my favour: come, just as you are, with all your sins upon you; stop not to heal yourselves in part; but come instantly to your Physician; come and receive all my blessings freely, "without money, and without price." Come *in faith*, believing me able to save you to the uttermost, and as willing as I am able. Come also *in hope*: let your expectations be enlarged: "ye are not straitened in me; be not straitened in your own bowels." Count up all the blessings of time; survey all the glories of eternity; stretch your imagination to the uttermost; ask all that eye ever saw, or ear heard, or heart conceived; and I will not only grant your requests, but give "exceeding abundantly

^b Rom. vii. 24.

^c John vi. 35, 37, 44, 45, 65.

above all that ye can ask or think : " open your mouths wide, and I will fill them." Come moreover *in love*. Be not like persons driven to me through mere necessity, and influenced by nothing but a dread of condemnation ; but contemplate my character, meditate on my kindness, strive to comprehend the heights and depths of my love ; and let a sense of my love constrain you to walk with me, to depend upon me, to delight yourselves in me.'

Such may be supposed to be the import of the invitation. And every one who is weary and heavy-laden, whatever his burthen be, may consider it as addressed to himself in particular, as much as ever it was to those, who waited on the personal ministry of our Lord. Let us then hear him thus inviting us, as it were, *with his dying breath*, and *from his throne of glory* : and let us go to him with one accord ; yea, let us fly to him on the wings of love, even " as the doves to their windows."]

That nothing might be wanting to give efficacy to his invitation, our Lord added,

III. The promise with which it is enforced—

The world are glad to see us in our prosperity, and when we can participate in their pleasures : but in a day of adversity, when want and trouble come upon us, they are but too apt to lessen their regards, and to grow weary of our complaints. How different is the conduct of the Lord Jesus ! He bids us " call upon him in the time of trouble," and, instead of turning a deaf ear to our complaints, promises to " give us rest."

How *suitable* is this promise to those to whom it is made !

[What do the weary and heavy-laden desire ? If their troubles be of a *temporal* nature, they wish for something that shall soothe the anguish of their minds, and be a support unto their souls : and *this* our blessed Saviour administers by the aids of his grace, and the consolations of his Spirit. Are their sorrows altogether *spiritual* ? He speaks peace unto their conscience, saying unto them, " Be of good cheer, I am thy salvation : " he discovers unto them the sufficiency of his blood to cleanse them from sin, and the efficacy of his grace to subdue and mortify their lusts. He gives them that, which nothing else in the universe can supply, a firm and stable hope of pardon and peace, of holiness and glory. Whatever other blessings he should offer to the soul, they would all be despised in comparison of this : it is bread to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, healing to the sick, and life to the dead.]

And can any thing be more *precious* to a heavy-laden soul?

[The term used in the text imports far more than an exemption from labour and trouble: it implies also that refreshment which a great and seasonable relief administers. And how sweet is that peace which he imparts to a believing penitent! it is a "peace that passeth understanding," a "joy unspeakable and glorified." Surely the consolations of his Spirit are not unfitly called "an *earnest* of our inheritance," since they are indeed a beginning and foretaste of heaven in the soul. But we must extend our thoughts yet further, even to "the rest that remaineth for the people of God." Doubtless *that* was most eminently in the view of our blessed Lord; nor shall any thing short of all the glory and felicity of heaven be the portion of those who come to him aright.]

That it is also a *true and faithful* saying, there can be no doubt—

[Never did any come to our Lord without experiencing his truth and faithfulness. Many indeed there are who profess to follow him, while yet they are far from enjoying this promised blessing: but, instead of coming to him in faith and hope, and love, they are impelled only by terror; they listen to the suggestions of despondency; and they live under the reigning power of unbelief. No wonder then that they find not the rest which they desire. But if any go to him aright, there is no guilt, however great, which is not removed from their conscience, no tumult of contending passions that is not moderated and restrained, nor any earthly trouble in which they are not enabled to rejoice and glory. If under any calamity whatever we go to him like the Apostle, like him shall we receive such an answer as will turn our sorrow into joy, and make the very occasions of grief to be the sources of exultation and triumph^d.]

APPLICATION—

1. To those who feel not the burthen of sin—

[If we be exempt in a measure from earthly calamities, we have reason to rejoice. But to be unacquainted with spiritual troubles is no proper subject for self-congratulation. It is "the broken and contrite heart only which God will not despise." We may boast of our goodness, like the Pharisee, or the elder brother in the parable^e: but, like them, we shall have no forgiveness with God, nor any part in that joy, which returning prodigals shall experience in their Father's house.

^d 2 Cor. xii. 7—10.

^e Luke xv. 28, 29. and xviii. 11, 14.

We must “sow in tears, if ever we would reap in joy :” we must be heavy-laden with a sense of sin, if ever we would experience the rest which Christ will give^f.]

2. To those who are seeking rest—

[It is indeed a mercy to have an awakened conscience : but you must now guard with earnest and equal care against self-righteous hopes on the one hand, and desponding fears on the other. You may be ready to fear that your burthens are too heavy to be removed, and your sins too great to be forgiven : but the persons, whom Christ invites, are the heavy-laden, yea, *all* of them without exception, whatever be their burthens, and whatever be their sins. On the other hand, you may be tempted to seek rest in your duties or your frames : but it is Christ alone that ever can bestow it, and from him you must receive it as a free unmerited gift. Endeavour therefore to draw nigh to him in his appointed way ; and be assured that he will draw nigh to you with his promised blessings.]

3. To those who have attained rest and peace—

[A deliverance from fear and trouble, instead of relaxing our obligation to watchfulness, binds us to tenfold diligence in the ways of God. When therefore our Lord invites us to come to him for rest, he adds, “Take my yoke upon you ;” and then repeats the promise, in order to intimate, that a submission to his will is as necessary to our happiness, as an affiance in his name^g. Let this then be your daily care. If his yoke were ever so grievous, you could not reasonably hesitate to bear it, since the burthen of sin and misery, that he has removed from you, is infinitely heavier than any other can be. But “his yoke is easy and his burthen is light ;” and the bearing of it will conduce no less to your present, than to your everlasting felicity.]

^f Jer. ii. 35.

^g ver. 29.

MCCCL.

CHRIST A MEEK AND LOWLY TEACHER.

Matt. xi. 29. *Learn of me ; for I am meek and lowly in heart : and ye shall find rest unto your souls.*

EVERY office which Christ sustains in the economy of redemption, is replete with encouragement to sinful man. His sufficiency as our great High-Priest to make atonement for us, and his power as our King to subdue our enemies, are subjects of frequent meditation,

and sources of unspeakable comfort, to the true Christian. His prophetic office, especially as exercised towards ourselves, is less considered by Christians in general, though it is equally necessary for us, and no less conducive to our eternal welfare. In a preceding verse our Lord has told us, that none can know the Father, except they to whom the Son should reveal him; and, in the words before us, he invites all to come and learn of him the mysterious truths, which, though already recorded in the written word, cannot be apprehended aright, unless he unfold them to us, and enable us to understand them.

In these words we may discern,

I. Our duty—

Christ having undertaken to teach us the way of safety, and the way of duty, we should learn of him,

1. With the teachableness of children—

[Children receive with the most implicit submission whatever their teachers tell them. Thus should we learn of Christ: we should not bring our own preconceived notions to the Scriptures, or presume to try the mysteries of revelation at the bar of our own corrupt reason; but we should believe whatever God has spoken, and receive it simply on the authority of the speaker. Nor should the opinions of the wisest philosopher be of any weight with us, if they be clearly contrary to the voice of inspiration^a.]

2. With the diligence of students—

[They who have a thirst for knowledge, are almost constantly employed in deep thought, and laborious investigation. Nor do they account any pains too great, if only they can gain that eminence and distinction, which superior attainments will ensure. Thus should we be occupied in pursuit of divine knowledge; reading the word, “searching into it as for hidden treasures,” meditating upon it day and night, and praying over it for divine illumination. While others are careful, and cumbered about many things, we should be sitting at the feet of Jesus^b, and embracing all opportunities of religious instruction, whether in public or in private.]

3. With the obedience of devoted followers—

[Earthly knowledge may be merely speculative: divine knowledge *must be* practical; it is of no use at all, any further

^a Isai. viii. 20.

^b Luke x. 39—42.

than it purifies the heart and renews the life. Whatever we find to be the mind and will of God, that we must do without hesitation, and without reserve. As the reasonings of men are to be disregarded when opposed to the declarations of God, so are the maxims of men to be set at nought, when by adopting them we should violate a divine command. One single word, confirmed with THUS SAITH THE LORD, should operate more powerfully to the regulating of our faith and practice, than the sentiments and customs of the whole world combined.]

The description which our Lord has given us of his own character, shews what abundant provision is made for,

II. Our encouragement—

Our Lord's words are not to be understood as an exhortation to learn meekness and lowliness from his example, but as a reason why we should cheerfully submit ourselves to his teaching. In this view they are very encouraging: they imply, that,

1. He will condescend to our ignorance—

[Those who are proficient in deep knowledge, cannot bear the drudgery of teaching children the first rudiments of language. But Jesus, who is able to instruct the highest archangel, is yet willing to take, as it were, under his tuition the most ignorant of mankind. As in the days of his flesh, "he spake the word to men as they were able to bear it," so now will he give us "line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little^c." When his own disciples forbade people to bring their children to him, under the idea that his time ought not to be occupied with persons so incapable of benefiting by his instructions, he rebuked them, and desired that all, of whatever age or description, might have the freest access to him^d; being as willing to adapt himself to the capacity of a child as to the more enlarged understandings of the Scribes and Pharisees.]

2. He will bear with our dulness—

[Human teachers are but too apt to feel irritation from the stupidity of their disciples. But Jesus, who has infinitely more to bear with than we can have, is ever patient, and ready to renew yet again and again the lessons that he has given us a thousand times. Scarcely any person can be conceived more dull of understanding than his own disciples, who, after he had been teaching them for nearly four years, were yet ignorant of the necessity of his death, of the ends of his resurrection, and

^c Isai. xxviii. 10.

^d Mark x. 13, 14.

of the spiritual nature of his kingdom. He was constrained sometimes to complain of them in this very view ; “ Are ye also yet without understanding^e ? ” Nevertheless he continued to teach them, till he had initiated them fully into all the mysteries of his kingdom. And thus will he do to the most ignorant of men ; he will “ open their understandings^f, ” and “ guide them into all truth^g. ”]

3. He will encourage our feeblest efforts—

[It not unfrequently happens, that they who are slow of understanding, are altogether driven to despondency through the impatience of their teachers. But Jesus is all meekness and lowliness : and, however weak our efforts be, provided only they be sincere and humble, he will bless them with a measure of success, and with manifest tokens of his approbation. We may appeal to the experience of all, in confirmation of this truth : who ever sought instruction from him in a way of reading and prayer, without finding his mind gradually opening to an apprehension of the truth ? Has not Jesus shewn, if we may so speak, a partiality for the poor and weak, revealing to them what he has hidden from the wise and prudent^h ; confounding thereby the wisdom of the wiseⁱ, and securing to himself the glory of his own work ? Yes ; in reference to the illumination of the mind, as well as to any thing else, we may say, “ He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, but will bring forth judgment unto victory^k. ”]

But, in addition to the encouragement which his condescension affords us, we have a further inducement to learn of him, from the consideration of,

III. Our reward—

An attention to the instructions of earthly monitors is productive of no little benefit. But if we diligently learn of Christ, our advantages will be greater than we can well conceive : we shall find benefit to our *souls* ; we shall obtain “ rest,”

1. From the uncertainty of conjecture—

[Mankind in general are in a state of doubt respecting the most important of all concerns : though they may assent to the principal truths of Christianity, they feel no assurance respecting them. But those who have learned of Christ, soon attain a full persuasion of the things they have been taught. The Scripture speaks of a threefold assurance ; an assurance

^e Matt. xv. 16.

^f Luke xxiv. 25.

^g John xvi. 13.

^h Matt. xi. 25.

ⁱ 1 Cor. i. 27.

^k Matt. xii. 20. and Zech. iv. 10.

of understanding^l, an assurance of faith^m, and an assurance of hopeⁿ: of all these, the men of this world have no idea: they are ready to speak of such things as marks of daring presumption. But the disciple of Christ has an inward witness of the truths he has learned^o; and knows perfectly that they are not a cunningly-devised fable^p. He can venture his soul upon them with as much confidence, as he can recline his weary body upon his bed. He knows in whom he has believed; and that the soul which is committed to Jesus, is safe for ever^q.]

2. From the accusations of conscience—

[In spite of men's endeavours to silence the convictions of their conscience, they never can obtain peace but in God's appointed way. But the person that has learned of Christ to rely simply on his blood and righteousness, enjoys a "peace that passeth all understanding." He knows that "the blood of Jesus will cleanse him from all sin," and that "there is no condemnation to the soul that believes in him" — — —]

3. From the turbulence of passion—

[Whatever difference there may be in the natural tempers of men, all have some predominant passion that leads them captive. But the disciple of Christ has a new and more powerful principle infused into his soul^r; by means of which he is enabled to bring into subjection his corrupt appetites, and to mortify those evil dispositions which are such a fruitful source of misery to the unregenerate. This forms the great line of distinction between the Lord's people and others; for, whereas others are led captive by some sin, believers "have not so learned Christ, if they have indeed heard him and been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus^s:" on the contrary, "they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts^t."]

4. From the fear of death—

[Men may brave death on a field of battle; but all, except the true Christian, shrink from it in its more silent and gradual approaches. But Christ purchased for his followers a deliverance from this bondage^u. With respect to them, death has lost its sting: yea, it is counted amongst their richest treasures^x: and they are enabled to look forward to it with pleasure, as the period when all their conflicts will cease, and their joys be consummated for ever^y — — —]

^l Col. ii. 2.

^m Heb. x. 22.

ⁿ Heb. vi. 11.

^o Heb. xi. 13. ¹ John v. 10. and iii. 19.

^p 2 Pet. i. 16.

^q 2 Tim. i. 12.

^r Gal. v. 16, 17.

^s Eph. iv. 19—21.

^t Gal. v. 24.

^u Heb. ii. 14, 15.

^x 1 Cor. iii. 22.

^y Phil. i. 23.

“Such is the heritage of the servants of the Lord;” and such is the rest that Christ will impart to all who learn of him.]

ADDRESS—

[Are there *any* amongst us *that are prosecuting human learning with avidity*? O remember, that the knowledge of Christ infinitely transcends all other knowledge^z, and will bring with it a more certain, and far nobler, recompence. Be persuaded then to devote to it some portion of every day, and the whole of your sabbaths, that you may not only be wise, but “wise unto salvation^a.”

Are there *any that are dejected on account of their own incapacity to learn*? Consider the abilities of your Teacher; and say, whether he be not able to instruct *you*, as well as others? He can make “the blind to see out of obscurity, and out of darkness^b.” yea, he will the more readily exert himself on your behalf, because the excellency of the power displayed in your proficiency will the more evidently appear to be of him^c. Take comfort then, and expect the certain accomplishment of that promise, “Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord^d.”]

^z Phil. iii. 8.

^a 2 Tim. iii. 15.

^b Isai. xxix. 18.

^c 2 Cor. iv. 7.

^d Hos. vi. 3.

MCCCLI

CHRIST GREATER THAN THE TEMPLE.

Matt. xii. 6. *I say unto you, that in this place is One greater than the Temple.*

IT is said, concerning our blessed Lord, that he “endured, in a most extraordinary degree, the contradiction of sinners against himself^a.” And in reading his history, we are struck with it continually. There was not any thing which he either said or did, which was not made a subject of cavil to his enemies. Even his most beneficent acts were condemned as violations of the law^b, or as affording occasion for “the Romans to destroy both their place and nation^c.” In the chapter before us, we have a remarkable instance of their carping at an action in his Disciples, which, if done by any other person, would have caused no complaint. Our Lord was going with his Disciples

^a Heb. xii. 3.

^b John v. 8, 9, 16.

^c John xi. 43, 44, 47, 48, 53.

through a corn-field, on the Sabbath-day; and they, being hungry, plucked some ears of corn, and rubbed them in their hands, and ate the corn. This the law of Moses expressly authorized them to do^d; and therefore the *act* could not be condemned. But the law prohibited all kinds of labour on the Sabbath-day; and the Pharisees, with hypocritical malignity, interpreted this act as a kind of *reaping* and *threshing-out* the corn; and cast reflections on our Lord for sanctioning such a violation of the Sabbath. Our Lord therefore vindicated his Disciples: first, on the ground of its being *a matter of necessity*, in which case it superseded the observance of a ceremonial institution. In proof of this, he adduced the instance of David, who, having no food to satisfy himself and his followers on one particular emergency, took the loaves of shew-bread, which were to be eaten by none but the priests alone, and satisfied the calls of nature with that^e. This was generally acknowledged as a justifiable act in David, because of the urgency of the occasion; and on the same ground the conduct of his Disciples was justifiable, as was his also in permitting it. Our Lord next vindicated it on the ground of *precedent*: for, notwithstanding all the injunctions respecting rest on the Sabbath-day, the priests in the temple engaged in labour, to a very great extent, on every Sabbath, being occupied in slaying and offering the appointed sacrifices. *They*, notwithstanding they thus “profaned the Sabbath, were blameless,” because the service of the temple required it. In like manner, the Disciples, being engaged in his work, were blameless: for “*He* was greater than the temple;” and, consequently, was entitled to suspend the observance of the Sabbath, so far as his service required it; for “*He* was Lord even of the Sabbath-day^f.”

In discoursing on this subject, I will,

I. Confirm our Lord's assertion—

Our blessed Lord did not so fully declare his Messiahship to the Pharisees as he did to some of a more

^d Deut. xxiii. 2.

^e Lev. xxiv. 5—9. with 1 Sam. xxi. 6.

^f ver. 1—8,

candid disposition; as the Samaritan woman^g, and the man who had been born blind^h. Yet, on proper occasions, he was not backward to assert his superiority to all the sons of men. Jonas was a prophet; and Solomon a king; but he was, in every view, greater than either the one or the other of themⁱ. And, of all the structures in the universe, the temple was infinitely the most august and sacred: yet did he, without hesitation, declare himself to be greater than the temple^k.

In order to confirm this assertion, I shall not enter generally into the proofs of the divinity of Christ, but shall consider minutely the comparison here instituted between the temple and him: and, stating those things which most ennobled the temple, I will distinctly mark the superiority of Christ in every particular.

The temple then, with every vessel in it, was made after a pattern formed by God himself; and given to David, and to Solomon, for that end^l—

[But the Lord Jesus Christ was himself formed by the very hand of God. He was formed, as no other person ever was, by the immediate agency of the Holy Ghost; as the angel had announced to the Virgin Mary: “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore, also, that Holy thing which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God^m.” Nor was it in his person only, but in his offices also, that he was pre-eminently the product of Divine wisdom and power. In him are combined the kingly, prophetic, and sacerdotal offices; all of which he executes, in a spiritual manner, over the face of the whole earth, yea, and in heaven itself too; and will continue so to do, even to the end of time. It was in reference to him and his offices that the temple itself was formed, and all its ordinances were appointed. They were but the shadow, of

^g John iv. 25, 26.

^h John ix. 35—37.

ⁱ ver. 41, 42.

^k Whether we read *μείζων* or *μείζον*, denoting a *person* or a *thing*, we must of necessity understand it of our Lord himself: only, in the latter case we must suppose him to point to his own body; as he did when he said, “Destroy *this Temple*, and in three days I will raise it up:” John ii. 20, 21.

^l 1 Chron. xxviii. 11, 12, 18, 19.

^m Luke i. 35. compared with Heb. ix. 11.

which he was the substance: and consequently his superiority in this respect is fully establishedⁿ.]

Again: the temple was richly furnished with every thing which could conduce to the glory of God, or to the welfare of man—

[The candlestick, the table of shew-bread, the altar of incense, the censer, the ark of the covenant, with numberless other vessels, all of the purest gold, and of the most exquisite workmanship, distinguished this building far beyond any that ever existed upon earth. But they were very faint shadows of his incomprehensible fulness and excellency. In Him their respective uses were all combined. He was at once the sacrifice, the altar that sanctified it, and the Priest that offered it. He was “the light of the whole world;” and “the living bread, of which whosoever eats shall live for ever.” He was the laver in which every child of man must wash both his person and his offerings. He was the ark, which contained in it the law, and was covered in all its exact dimensions by the mercy-seat; for, by his own fulfilment of the law for us, he rendered the exercise of mercy commensurate with the necessities of fallen man. Here again, then, compare the shadow with the substance, and say whether the Lord Jesus Christ do not infinitely surpass the temple in the very things which constituted its chief grandeur.]

But further: the temple had the Shechinah, the bright cloud, the symbol of the Deity, constantly residing in it—

[This was doubtless its highest glory. (I speak of the former temple, previous to the Babylonish captivity; and not of the latter, in which many of its principal ornaments were wanting.) But in the Lord Jesus Christ dwelt, not a symbol of the Deity, but the Deity himself, “even all the fulness of the Godhead bodily^o.” This explains that prophecy of the Prophet Haggai, that “the glory of the latter house should exceed the glory of the former^p.” How could that be, it may be asked, when in the latter temple were wanting the Shechinah, the Urim and Thummim, and the fire that came down from heaven? The answer is plain: The Lord Jesus Christ himself came to the latter house: and his presence in it was an honour infinitely exceeding all that ever was conferred on the first temple; because he was not a symbol of the Deity, but the great God himself in an incarnate state, even “Emmanuel, God with us^q.”]

ⁿ Mark carefully the precision with which this is stated in Heb. viii. 5.

^o Col. ii. 9.

^p Hagg. ii. 9.

^q Matt. i. 23.

I add yet once more: the temple was the place of confluence to all the tribes of Israel, even to all who desired to have access to God, or to obtain blessings at his hands^r—

[And whither does every sinner in the universe go, but to Jesus^s? To him is every eye directed^t: “through him alone can any man have access to God^u:” in him does every saint “desire to be found^x:” and through him shall all blessings, temporal, spiritual, eternal, flow down in richest abundance upon all who believe in him^y. Indeed, in this respect his superiority is most amply marked: for all that he does, is by virtue of the “one offering of himself once offered:” whereas the offerings in the temple, because of their inefficacy, were renewed from year to year^z: his grace also extends to sins which the law of Moses could not reach^a; and confers benefits which that was unable to impart^b; and endures, not for a year only, like that under the law, but through the countless ages of eternity^c.]

To add any thing further would be superfluous. The superiority of Christ to the temple is so evident, that, without dwelling any longer upon it, I will proceed to,

II. Point out the peculiar interest which we have in it—

Here again we go back to our text, that we may derive from thence as much as possible for the elucidation of our subject. The establishment of Christ's superiority to the temple shews,

1. His right to command—

[That was the precise point at issue between him and the Pharisees: Had he a right to authorize a deviation from the letter of the Mosaic law? He affirmed he had. They themselves admitted, that the strict observance of the Sabbath was dispensed with for the service of the temple: and if He was greater than the temple, the same right was vested in him. Nothing less than *divine* authority could in *any* case supersede a *divine* command: and, if he were greater than the temple, a divine authority must reside in him; consequently, he exercised no other right than what strictly, and of necessity, pertained unto him.

^r Ps. cxxii. 4.

^s John vi. 68.

^t Isai. xlv. 22.

^u Eph. ii. 18.

^x Phil. iii. 9.

^y Eph. i. 3.

^z Heb. x. 1—4, 10.

^a Acts xiii. 39.

^b Heb. vii. 19.

^c Heb. x. 11, 14, 17, 18.

Now, there are divine commands, which we also, under all ordinary circumstances, are bound to obey. We must yield compliance with the lawful edicts of the civil magistrate^d: we must “obey them, not only for wrath, but also for conscience’ sake:” and “if we resist his lawful authority, we shall receive to ourselves damnation^e.” Yet, if the civil magistrate enjoin what is contrary to the command of Christ, or forbid any thing which Christ has enjoined, we must obey Christ in preference to him. The Apostles, when forbidden to preach or teach in the name of Jesus, appealed to his very judges, saying, “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard^f.” In like manner, we are commanded to love and honour our parents: and so important is that command, that it is distinguished from the rest, by being enforced, as the Apostle observes, with a special promise^g. Yet even that is superseded, when they exert their authority in opposition to Christ. Nay, more: strange as the injunction sounds, we are commanded even to “*hate* father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, in comparison of him; and on no other terms can we ever be acknowledged as his disciples^h.” (Of course, no one will be so absurd as to imagine that this declaration is to be understood in any other than a *comparative* view: for in any other view we are not authorized to HATE an *enemy*, much less our nearest relatives.) Our duty to the Lord Jesus Christ is of paramount obligation, and supersedes every thing that is opposed to it. The law of self-preservation is strongly binding upon us: but if fidelity to Christ require the sacrifice of it, “not even life itself must be dear to usⁱ:” we must be willing to lay it down at any time for his sake^k: and if, at the expense of our duty to him, we save our lives, we shall lose them to all eternity^l.

This, then, must be a principle deeply fixed in our minds, That the authority of Christ is to rule us under all circumstances; and that nothing under heaven is to be suffered to interfere with it. Men who cast off his yoke will indeed clamour against us, and express their indignation against us for not complying with *their* will. But we may safely leave ourselves in the hands of Jesus; who, as our Advocate, will plead our cause; and, as our Judge, will pass a sentence of approval upon us in the last day. He will *then* at least, if not before, vindicate our conduct, and “make our righteousness to appear as the noon-day^m.”]

2. His sufficiency to save—

^d Tit. iii. 1. ^e Rom. xiii. 1, 2, 5. ^f Acts iv. 19, 20. and v. 29

^g Eph. vi. 2. ^h Luke xiv. 26. ⁱ Acts xx. 24.

^k Acts xxi. 13. ^l Matt. x. 39. ^m Ps. xxxvii. 6.

[To all who observed the institutions of the law in faith, they were effectual for the salvation of their souls. And who ever applied to Jesus in vain? Who ever relied on his sacrifice, and was confounded? What is there that shall be kept back from one who implores blessings at his hands? Shall *pardon* be refused? No: "though his sins were red as scarlet or as crimson, they should become white as snow." "The blood of Jesus Christ should cleanse him from all sin." Shall *peace* be denied to the believing suppliant? No: "being justified by faith, he shall have peace with God;" so that, instead of looking forward with terror to the eternal world, he shall even now "rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Shall *strength* for future obedience be withheld? No: "the grace of Christ shall be sufficient for him;" and he shall be "able to do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth him." Shall *glory* be deemed too good for him? No: the Saviour, in whom he has believed, will judge him, and exalt him to a participation of his own inheritance, his own kingdom, his own glory. The principal utensils of the temple, the lavers, the tables, the candlesticks, were, in the temple, *ten times* more numerous than in the tabernacleⁿ: and this marked the great superiority of the temple and its services to the tabernacle and the ordinances observed in it. And say I too much, if I say, that in Jesus our blessings are increased? Verily, they *are* increased, not tenfold, but a hundredfold: for, till he was glorified, they were sent forth only in slender portions: but from that time they have been poured out like a river^o.]

Let us then OBSERVE from hence,

1. How highly we are privileged under the Christian dispensation—

[Jesus came in person to the second temple, and thereby raised it above the first. And does he not come to his temple in our day? Yes, he does: not corporeally indeed, but spiritually, and with great power. He has promised that he would do so: "Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them^p." And this he will continue to do: as he has said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world^q." Nor is it any disadvantage to us that he comes only in a spiritual way: for they who beheld him in person were stumbled at the meanness of his appearance; and could not conceive how one so poor and destitute and despised should possess the authority he claimed. But we have no such stumbling-block in our way. We know who he is, and

ⁿ Compare Exod. xxv. 23, 31. & xxx. 18. with 2 Chron. iv. 6—8.

^o John vii. 39.

^p Matt. xviii. 20.

^q Matt. xxviii. 20.

what he is, even "the Mighty God, and the Prince of Peace." We know too what he can do: and that all which was done, under the law by God, in his temple, he can and will do in the midst of us. To us he will give his answers of peace; yea, "he will give grace and glory: and withhold no good thing from us" in time or in eternity. Let us know, then, our exalted privilege, and have our expectations enlarged, in proportion to the advantages we enjoy.]

2. With what delight we should attend the ordinances of our God—

[Never should we go up to the House of God without expecting to meet our Saviour there. We should not go to public ordinances merely to perform a duty, but to enjoy a privilege; not to hear a preacher, but to meet our God and Saviour. O, what a different appearance would there be in ordinances, if we all attended them in a becoming frame! What devotion would there be in our prayers! what reverential attention to the word delivered! and what "showers of blessings" would be poured out upon our souls! Remember, I pray you, brethren, that, when you come up hither, you come to meet your Lord, who is already waiting here to receive you. Be never satisfied, if you do not see him: and, if at any time his word be applied with power to your souls, acknowledge him in the gift: for it is through his power alone that the word is effectual for any spiritual good^r. Thus shall your worship here prepare you for higher services above; and your acknowledgments of his goodness be a prelude to your Hosannahs in the realms of bliss^s.]

^r 2 Cor. x. 4.

^s Rev. v. 12.

MCCCLII.

THE COMPASSION OF CHRIST TOWARDS THE WEAK.

Matt. xii. 18—21. *Behold, my servant whom I have chosen; my beloved in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my Spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory. And in his name shall the Gentiles trust.*

ONE might gather almost as complete a character of Christ from the Prophecies, as from the Gospels themselves. Not only the great incidents relating to his life and death were foretold, but his spirit and

conduct were most minutely delineated. He had just withdrawn himself from the Pharisees who sought to destroy him; and had strongly enjoined his attendants not to make known his miracles. This conduct appeared strange to those who were expecting him to erect a temporal kingdom. But the Evangelist declares that these very things had been made the subject of prophecy many hundred years before. The passage quoted by him from Isaiah is recorded, not with literal exactness, but according to its true import. It declares,

I. The commission given to Christ—

Christ was the Father's ambassador to our ruined world—

[However, in his divine nature, Christ was equal to the Father, yet, in his mediatorial capacity, he was the Father's servant. The office assigned him was to shew judgment, that is, the way of righteousness and salvation both to Jews and Gentiles; and for this he was qualified by an immeasurable communication of the Spirit to him^a.]

In this view the Father exceedingly delighted in him—

[The Father doubtless regarded him as his beloved *for his own sake*; but was peculiarly pleased with him as having undertaken the work of man's redemption. In him he saw, as it were, all his own perfections glorified, and the thrones of apostate angels occupied by sinners of the human race. Hence in triumphant exultation he declares his acquiescence in him, and calls every human being to "behold" him.]

The prophet further specifies,

II. The manner in which he should execute it—

He was to accomplish his work,

1. Silently—

[There was to be nothing in him ostentatious, contentious, or clamorous: together with firmness and fidelity, he exercised continued gentleness and meekness^b. Would to God that many who bear a similar commission would learn of him to execute it in a similar way!]

2. Tenderly—

^a John iii. 34. Isai. xi. 2, 3.

^b His conduct, as related in the context, strongly illustrates this.

[The terms here used seem to be proverbial. The former metaphor is taken from reeds, which were used as musical instruments by shepherds, and which, when bruised, could no longer emit any melodious sound. The smoking flax alludes to the wick of a lamp which, when the flame is extinct, produces an offensive smell. Both these metaphors fitly represent the state of a soul bruised under a sense of sin, and lamenting that its grace is nearly extinguished, while whole clouds of corruption are arising from it. But Jesus, instead of despising its low estate, will rather fan the spark into a flame, and cause the worthless reed to send forth melody that shall delight the ears even of God himself.]

3. Successfully—

[However gentle his exertions, he shall never ultimately fail. As his forbearance towards his enemies gave them a momentary appearance of triumph, so he sometimes delays his aid even to his most favoured people; but he will at last prevail, and make his grace victorious in their souls.]

To this description of the Saviour the prophet naturally subjoins,

III. Our duty towards him—

Blessed be God, our duty is our highest privilege—

We are commanded to trust in him,

1. For instruction—

[Jesus is both qualified and commissioned to enlighten the Gentiles^c; nor are there any so weak and ignorant but that he can make them wise to salvation^d. Let us then “not lean to our own understanding,” but seek to be “taught of him^e.”]

2. For acceptance—

[It is not merely in his individual capacity, but as the head of the elect world, that he is so pleasing to his heavenly Father. We therefore, if we believe on him, may be certain of acceptance through him^f; yea, God will not behold a spot in the most polluted soul, if it be only washed in his blood, and clothed in his righteousness^g.]

3. For victory—

[None have need to despond on account of their own weakness and corruptions: the “grace of Christ is sufficient,” and shall prove so to all who trust in him. “Wherever he has begun the good work he will carry it on unto the end^h.”]

^c Luke i. 78, 79. and ii. 32.

^d Matt. xi. 25.

^e Eph. iv. 20, 21.

^f Eph. i. 6, 10.

^g Eph. v. 27. Jude, ver. 24.

^h Phil. i. 6. Rom. viii. 37.

APPLICATION—

1. The text is addressed to *all the sinners of the Gentiles*—

[How gracious is God in thus inviting sinners to “behold” his Son! And how powerful the recommendation that is thus enforced by the example of God himself! But can any thing be a stronger reproof to those, who, instead of choosing Christ, and being well pleased with him, have uniformly despised and rejected him? Say then, ye ungrateful world, whom will ye condemn; yourselves, or God? Still however, the invitation is addressed to you, “Behold my Son.” O that you may behold him now to your joy, and not hereafter to your confusion!]

2. But the words are more eminently suited to *the weak and desponding*—

[More consolatory declarations could not have been desired by man, or given by God. The lowest possible state of grace is here described in most appropriate terms, and an assurance given that it shall prove victorious in the issue. Let the desponding soul then learn to “trust” in Jesus; and even in the midst of conflicts sing, “Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”]

MCCCLIII.

THE BLIND AND DUMB DÆMONIAC HEALED.

Matt. xii. 22, 23. *Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David?*

IN establishing the Mosaic dispensation, God introduced it with many miracles. It might well be expected therefore that, when he should supersede that dispensation, and establish another in its place, he would confirm that also with miracles, so as to leave no doubt but that he was the author of “that which should remain, no less than of that which was to vanish away.” Accordingly our blessed Saviour wrought miracles without number, and appealed to them as substantiating his claim to divine authority: “Though ye believe not me, believe the works; that ye may know and believe, that the Father is in me,

and I in him^a." It should seem that, for the furtherance of this end, Satan was permitted to exercise greater power over the bodies of men, than was ever exercised by him either before or since: that so the divine mission of Jesus might be the more signally marked by his conquests over Satan.

In discoursing on the miracle before us, I shall shew,

I. What proof the Lord Jesus here gave of his Messiahship—

There was a man whom Satan by his malignant influence had caused to be "both blind and dumb:" and him did our Lord in an instant restore to the perfect use of his faculties, so that "the blind and dumb both spake and saw." At this stupendous miracle "the people were all amazed:" and the conclusion which they drew from it was, "Is not this the son of David?" Under the name and character of "the Son of David" the Messiah was expected: and from the miracle which they had seen, the people inferred, that Jesus must be he: yea, so undeniable did this inference appear, that they asked with confidence, "Is not this the son of David?"

[This miracle was precisely of the kind that the Messiah was expected to perform. It had been foretold by the prophet, "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped: then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing: &c^b." And to such miracles as these our Lord himself referred in proof of his Messiahship. When John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to inquire of Jesus, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" our Lord replied, "Go and shew John again the things that ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them: and blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me^c." Indeed so wonderful was this miracle, and so evident, on Scripture principles, the truth deduced from it, that the envious Pharisees, in order to obviate the conclusion drawn from it, ascribed the miracle to a confederacy with the devil. But our Lord shewed them, that, on

^a John x. 37, 38.

^b Isai. xxxv. 5, 6.

^c Matt. xi. 2—6.

their view of the matter, Satan would be subverting his own kingdom: but, as they could not conceive he would do that, it was clear, that the kingdom of God must be come unto them^d.

Thus did our Lord by this miracle establish his claim to the Messiahship, and give ample ground for all the people to receive him as the appointed Saviour of the world.]

And have these wonders ceased? No: I feel myself authorized to declare,

II. What corresponding proofs he is ever ready to give to us at this day—

Satan has no longer the same power over the bodies of men, that he once exercised. But he has as great power over their souls as ever: and

We are *spiritually* in the same predicament with the man whom Jesus healed—

[We are, whilst in an unregenerate state, “both blind and dumb.” We are “blind.” What is there which we see aright? What views have we of our *duty*, our *interest*, or our *happiness*? One would suppose that every rational being should see it his *duty* to love and serve his God; and his *interest* to secure the divine favour; and his *happiness* to enjoy the presence of God, and a foretaste of his eternal inheritance. But where do we find persons acting in accordance with such views? Men’s earthly pursuits appear to them of paramount obligation; and all desire after heavenly things is swallowed up by their anxiety about the things of time and sense. In vain does God tell them, that this world is only as “a broken cistern that can hold no water^e,” and that no solid comfort can be derived from any source but from God, “the fountain of living waters:” *This* they will not believe, notwithstanding the experience of every day bears testimony to it. And whence is this unbelief, but from the influence of Satan upon their minds? Yes, “*The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not^f.*”

So also are we “dumb.” Our tongue is spoken of by God as “our glory,” because by that, more than by any other member, we are enabled to glorify him^g. But how is that member employed for God? We speak not *to* him in the exercise of prayer and praise, though our multiplied necessities and mercies call for these acknowledgments every day and hour of our lives. Nor do we in our converse with the world speak *of* God. Every other subject that can be thought of

^d ver. 24—28.

^f 2 Cor. iv. 4.

^e Jer. ii. 13.

^g Ps. lviii. 7, 8.

occupies our tongues rather than this, insomuch that amongst our friends and relatives it seems, as it were, to be banished by general consent. Still less do we speak *for* God. We see him dishonoured on every side; but we dare not advocate his cause. If our own father or friend were so insulted, we should find somewhat to speak in their behalf: but for God and his honour we have no concern: we can see the whole world risen in rebellion against him, and never once bear our testimony against their impiety. And whence is this, but from the same Satanic influence? Yes, “our walking thus according to the course of this world is owing to that prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in all the children of disobedience^h.”]

But from this state our blessed Lord is ever willing to deliver us—

[He is constituted “both Lord and Christⁱ.” He is exalted on purpose that he may give us the grace we stand in need of^k, and thus “destroy in us the works of the devil^l.” He on his ascension to heaven poured out the gifts of the Holy Ghost, which he has promised to us also^m; and by his Spirit “he will open the eyes of our understandingⁿ,” and “open our lips also that we may shew forth his praise^o.” This is the very office which he has undertaken to perform: He is “made Head over all things to the Church for this very end^p,” and “there is a fulness treasured up in him for this express purpose^q.” No man has any need to be discouraged, as though he were beyond the reach of this mercy: he cannot be in a more hopeless state than the man who is spoken of in my text: and we are assured, that “the things which are hid from the wise and prudent, our Lord will reveal unto babes.” Let all then look unto him; the blind, that they may see, and the dumb that they may speak; and not one shall be disappointed of his hope: for our blessed Lord has “counselled all to come to him for these blessings^r,” and “no soul shall ever seek his face in vain.”]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are yet under the power of Satan—

[But where shall I find these, or even so much as one of them? Are *you*, or *you*, or *you* amongst this unhappy number? No; if we will take your own word, we shall not find so much as one. But are there none amongst you that are destitute of a spiritual discernment, and whose whole conduct

^h Eph. ii. 2.

ⁱ Acts ii. 36.

^k Acts v. 31.

^l 1 John iii. 8.

^m Acts ii. 38, 39.

ⁿ Eph. i. 17, 18.

^o Ps. li. 15.

^p Eph. i. 22, 23.

^q Col. i. 19. John i. 16.

^r Rev. iii. 18.

shews them to be blind as to all practical perception of their duty, their interest, and their happiness? Alas! we need not go far to find such as these; for on every side of us we see persons living for themselves, and not for God; for time, and not for eternity. I ask not then respecting your worldly possessions or your intellectual attainments. If you have not a truly *spiritual* use of your faculties, possess what else ye may, ye are in a far worse condition than the man whom Satan had rendered blind and dumb. *His* wants might be supplied by others; *yours* cannot: *his* would cease at death; *yours* will never terminate: *his* might be far more than compensated by the acquisition of spiritual attainments; but what can ever compensate for the wants which *you* experience? Ten thousand worlds could not be to you any compensation for the loss of spiritual faculties and spiritual enjoyments. Then I entreat you come to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is as able and as willing to supply your wants as ever he was to heal those who were brought to him in the days of old — — —]

2. Those who have been delivered from him—

[Who that beheld that man's change of state did not cordially congratulate him on the mercy he had received? Yet was not the blessing conferred on him in any degree to be compared with that which *they* have experienced, whose eyes are opened to behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and whose tongues are loosed to speak forth his praise. Dear brethren, so far as these blessings are enjoyed by you, you are restored to the happiness which Christ has purchased for you by his blood, the happiness which shall ere long be perfected in glory. Give honour then to the Lord Jesus Christ: and, when you see how many around you still remain both blind and dumb, stand amazed at the distinguishing mercy which has been vouchsafed to you — — — And now, need I tell you how to employ the faculties which have been thus renewed? Surely of yourselves you will feel, that they should be henceforth consecrated altogether to your God. "Get then your spiritual senses more and more exercised" on spiritual things; and let your one employment henceforth be on earth, what it will ere long without interruption be in heaven, to behold the glory, and to shew forth the praises, of your adorable Benefactor.]

MCCCLIV.

THE NECESSITY OF A DECIDED ADHERENCE TO CHRIST.

Matt. xii. 30. *He that is not with me, is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad.*

TO inculcate a devotedness of heart to God, and to insist upon it as indispensably necessary to salvation, is generally deemed harsh and uncharitable: and certainly, if it were not required in Scripture, we should be exceedingly blame-worthy in so alarming and terrifying the minds of men: but we must speak what God has spoken, and deliver faithfully what he has commissioned us to declare. To what purpose would it be for us to deceive our fellow-creatures? We might speak of candour, and prophecy smooth things, and lull men asleep in sin; but we could not invalidate the word of God, or reverse the sentence that he shall utter: the declaration of our Lord would still condemn both our hearers and ourselves: "If we are not with him, we must be against him," and he will account us his enemies in the last day.

In considering this declaration, it will be proper,

I. To explain it—

Taken by itself, it has no material difficulty in it—

[The Lord Jesus Christ is a Sovereign, who is at war with all the powers of darkness: and we, as his subjects, are bound to fight his battles — — — Among the subjects of earthly monarchs no neutrality is admitted: if their kingdom be invaded, all must unite to repel the enemy: neutrality in such a case would be treason. Now thus, whosoever joins not himself to the standard of our Lord, to fight under his banners, and to oppose his enemies, is a traitor to his cause; "he is really against our Lord, if he be not for him." As a labourer who has neglected to gather up his corn, has in fact wasted and scattered the property of his employer, so he, whose duty it is to exert himself in gathering a harvest of souls for the Lord Jesus, if he neglect his duty, is really the means of alienating them the more, and of driving them farther from him.]

But, when compared with a passage of an opposite aspect, a considerable difficulty arises from it—

[Our Lord on another occasion used an expression apparently the very reverse of this: "He that is not against us, is on our part^a." Now which of these assertions is true? for, *in words*, they plainly contradict each other: or, if both be true, how are we to reconcile them with each other? The true way

^a Mark ix. 40.

to ascertain their meaning is, to consider the *occasions* on which they were spoken.

When our Lord uttered the words of our text, he had been arguing against those who imputed his miracles to a confederacy with Satan; and had shewn, that as the whole aim of his life was to destroy the influence of Satan over men, Satan would never have aided him in such a work; he would rather have withstood him to the utmost of his power: and consequently, the miracle which Jesus had wrought in expelling Satan from the demoniac, evinced his power over Satan, and his determination finally to bruise him under his people's feet. From hence our Lord took occasion to observe, that there must be the same determined hostility in his power against sin and Satan as he himself had evinced; and that, if any of them should make a truce with Satan even for an hour, they would instantly be considered as traitors to him, and be dealt with as his enemies.

But when our Lord spake the words recorded by St. Mark, he had been reproving his disciples for presuming to forbid a man to cast out devils in the name of Jesus, merely because he did not associate himself with *them*: "Forbid him not," says our Lord: 'he is not a partisan of yours, it is true: but he is advancing my interests, as well as you; only he is doing it in a somewhat different way. His performing of miracles in my name is a proof of his faith in me, and of his concern for my honour: and therefore, though he may not have so clear views as you, or walk exactly in the way that you would have him, yet he is to be acknowledged as a friend of mine: he does nothing against me; and therefore must be considered as on my side.'

Thus the two passages, though apparently opposite, involve no contradiction whatever: the one shews us how to act towards the avowed enemies of Christ; the other, how to act towards his less conspicuous friends: the one forbids *neutrality*; the other *bigotry*, or *party-spirit*.]

Viewing these words then as a declaration that neutrality cannot be endured amongst the followers of Christ, we proceed,

II. To confirm it—

There is a twofold warfare, which, as Christian soldiers, we are to maintain; and to each of them does the declaration in our text apply. We must be decided and constant in our opposition to,

1. The enemies of Christ *within* us—

[Amongst these we must number all our corrupt affections and propensities, which tend to the subversion of Christ's

authority within us. Not one of these is to be spared, though it should be dear as a right eye, or apparently necessary as a right hand. They are indeed exceedingly numerous, and have "strong holds" which are almost impregnable. They are also mustered and led on by a subtle adversary, "the prince of the power of the air, who worketh in all the children of disobedience." Still, however, we must not be discouraged, but must go forth against them, "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." We have armour, if I may so say, forged for us in heaven, and fitted to every part that is vulnerable, except the back, which we are on no account to turn to our enemy. Clothed in this, we need not be afraid: with the sword of the Spirit and the shield of faith, we shall in due time be "more than conquerors." But we must never make a truce, or even parley with any of our enemies. "The filthiness both of the flesh and of the spirit" must be opposed without ceasing, and without reserve. Every evil temper, every sensual inclination, all sloth, impenitence, unbelief, or whatever it be that "wars against the soul," must be mortified and subdued; nor must we ever cease from our conflict till we have overcome, and are crowned with victory.

Now, if we be not thus resolute, we shall not only not advance the kingdom of God within us, but shall weaken and destroy it. The work of grace within us is not like that of a painter or statuary, that may be left and resumed at pleasure, but like that of a ponderous stone rolled up a steep ascent, which will return, as soon as the force that impelled it is withdrawn. Relapses into sin tend exceedingly to impair the gracious principle within us; they harden the heart, and sear the conscience, and "grieve the Holy Spirit of God;" and if not speedily repented of, set us further from God than we were before our minds were first awakened^b: so true is it, that, if we "cease to gather with Christ, we scatter abroad."]

2. The enemies of Christ *around* us—

[The whole world is, as it were, risen up in arms against our Lord and Saviour; all of them saying, "We will not have this man to reign over us." Against them, therefore, we are to take part with our blessed Lord. We must protest against their maxims, their principles, and their conduct. We are "not to be of the world, even as Christ was not of the world." Instead of attempting to hold communion with them, which is impossible, we should "come out from among them, and be separate^c." The attempting to seek their friendship is an act of hostility against Christ himself^d. Let us not however

^b 2 Pet. ii. 21. Matt. xii. 45.

^c 2 Cor. vi. 14—17.

^d Jam. iv. 4.

mistake, as though religion required us to hate any of our fellow-creatures; we must *love their persons*, but *hate their ways*. This line of conduct is prescribed to all the followers of Christ: whilst they “glory in the cross of Christ,” they must “by means of that cross be crucified unto the world, and the world be crucified unto them.”

Now, if we draw back from this avowal of our sentiments and this decision in the cause of Christ, we rank ourselves immediately on the side of his enemies. “In forsaking his law, we praise the wicked,” when rather, “by keeping his law we should contend with them^e.” “We strengthen the hands of Christ’s enemies,” and in the most effectual manner promise them life, though every part of the inspired volume threatens them with death^f. Let us remember then that we must be faithful to our profession: we must shew “whose we are, and whom we serve:” we must “shine as lights in a dark world,” and, “instead of being conformed to the world, we must, by being transformed through the renewing of our minds, prove, and exhibit to all around us, what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God^g.”]

Let us LEARN then from hence,

1. The proper objects of Christian zeal—

[There is a zeal that is good; and there is “a zeal that is not according to knowledge.” Of the latter kind was that which the Apostles manifested when they forbade a man to cast out devils, merely because he did not follow with them. The work itself was good; and its being done in the name of Jesus, gave them reason to believe that he was a believer in Christ, though he did not unite himself to them. Should they not then rather have rejoiced in the good that was done, though it was not done precisely in the way which they would have preferred? Alas! the spirit which they indulged prevails in every age: men do not like to see the empire of Satan assailed, or the kingdom of Christ established, if it be not done by their own particular party, or by the means which they particularly prefer: and they would rather that the good were wholly left undone, than that persons, differing from each other in smaller matters, should unite together to effect it. All this is the effect of pride, and envy, and bigotry: and, whatever such persons may think, they will be reproved by Christ, even as the Apostles were. The proper object of our zeal is the advancement of Christ’s kingdom upon earth, and in our own hearts in particular. To be zealously affected always in such a cause is a good thing: and I pray God that we may never relax our exertions in it to the latest hour of our lives.]

^e Prov. xxviii. 4. ^f Ezek. xiii. 22. ^g Rom. xii. 2.

2. The necessity of abounding in it more and more—

[We have observed, that men cannot continue stationary in the divine life: we must either advance or decline. Now it is not at our first conversion only that the words of our text are applicable to us, but at every period of our lives. The longer we have professed ourselves the Lord's servants, the more necessity there is for firmness and decision. To become lukewarm, is the worst of states, the most offensive to God, and the most injurious to ourselves^h. We have this only alternative, either to maintain a warfare against all the enemies of Christ, or to make Christ himself our enemy: and can any one doubt which he should prefer? If we provoke *him* to anger, "will our hands be strong in the day that he shall deal with us?" Let us then "fight a good fight, and quit ourselves like men:" then shall we "be approved of him who has chosen us to be soldiers," and reign with him in glory for evermore.]

^h Rev. iii. 17, 18.

MCCCLV.

THE SIN AGAINST THE HOLY GHOST.

Matt. xii. 31. *I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.*

THE sins of men have, in all the ages of the world, been the means and occasions of displaying the Divine goodness. It is through the fall of the first Adam, and the crucifixion of Christ, the second Adam, that we attain the knowledge of God's mercy, and see how the exercise of it can consist with the rights of justice. The wickedness of the Pharisees, to whom the words of our text were addressed, was exceeding heinous: yet was it an occasion of manifesting the most unbounded compassion of our Lord. He had cast out a devil, and thereby not only conveyed a rich blessing to the person whom he had healed, but had given an irrefragable proof of his own divine mission. But the Pharisees, blinded by prejudice, imputed his miracle to a confederacy with the devil. Our Lord, instead of giving them up, as he might have justly done, to judicial blindness and impenitence, condescended meekly to reason with them on the subject, and the:

affectionately cautioned them against indulging so base a spirit; assuring them, that all which they had said and done against *him* might be forgiven; but that if they should persist in this conduct towards *the Holy Spirit* also, and reject *his* testimony, they would cut themselves off from all possibility of obtaining mercy.

Our Lord's address to them leads us to consider the extent of God's mercy; and shews us,

I. To what it will not extend—

It is of great importance to ascertain correctly what is meant by the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost—

[Many have thought that the sin against the Holy Ghost consisted in ascribing the miracles of Jesus to the agency of Satan. But this opinion is founded on a misconstruction of a passage in St. Mark's Gospel^a.] The Evangelist's observation, "Because they said, he hath an unclean spirit," was not intended to shew what the sin against the Holy Ghost was, but to specify what the occasion was, which called forth so awful an admonition. In that very place, the inspired writer contrasts the blasphemy against the Son of man, *which the Pharisees now uttered*, with the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, *which they were in danger of uttering*, when the Holy Ghost should be sent down from heaven^b: and he observes that the former might be forgiven; but that the latter could not.

The sin against the Holy Ghost was the acting towards the Holy Spirit, as they now did towards Christ: it was the resisting of all the evidences of Christianity, so as deliberately to pour contempt upon the truths revealed by the Holy Spirit: and, the ascribing of *his* miraculous powers, and gracious influences, to the agency of Satan^c."]

^a Mark iii. 30.

^b Mark iii. 28, 29. compared with the words following my text. Observe, he does not say "hath blasphemed," but "*shall* blaspheme."

^c This cannot be made more plain, than by the following paraphrase of a learned commentator: 'You have represented me as a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners, and as one who casts out devils by Beelzebub; and you will still go on, after all the miracles which I have wrought among you, to represent me as a false prophet, and a deceiver of the people: nevertheless all these grievous sins shall be forgiven you, if that last dispensation of the Holy Ghost, which I, after my ascension, shall send among you, shall prevail with you to believe in me: but if, when I have sent the Holy Ghost to testify the truth of my mission, and of my resurrection, you shall continue in your unbelief, and shall blaspheme the Holy Ghost, and represent *him* also as an evil spirit, your sin shall never be forgiven,

Why this sin in particular is excepted from the general offers of pardon, it is also of great importance to understand—

[It is plainly declared to be unpardonable. But is not the mercy of God sufficiently extensive to cover this? Yes, doubtless; for it is infinite, as all his perfections are. Is there not then a sufficiency in the blood of Christ to atone for this? Yes; his death is a sufficient propitiation for the sins of the whole world. Must we then refer it to the sovereign decree of heaven; and say, that God, in righteous judgment, has excepted this from the general proclamation of forgiveness? Perhaps this may be *one* reason: for St. John mentions “a sin unto death,” for the forgiveness of which it is in vain to intercede^d. But the more substantial reason is, that the sin itself, *in the very nature of things*, excludes a person from all hope of mercy. God has provided salvation for us through the blood of his Son, and the influences of his Spirit; and has told us that there neither is, nor ever will be, any other way of salvation for sinful man. Now if we despise this salvation, and account it only a devilish delusion, what can be done? We must die, *because we reject the only means of life*. As a man who has taken a poisonous draught, may live, provided he apply a proper remedy, so a man who has committed the most deadly sins may nevertheless be saved at last, if he truly embrace the Gospel of Christ: but if he will not use the remedy provided for him, he must abide the consequences, and perish for ever. We must not however imagine, that *every* rejection of the Gospel is unpardonable; for that, which is occasioned by an ignorance of its true nature, may be forgiven^e; but it then becomes unpardonable, when it is wilful and deliberate, against the convictions of our conscience, and the dictates of an enlightened judgment. It then argues a mind given up to its own delusions, and sealed up under final impenitence; and *therefore* it cannot be forgiven, *because* it will never be repented of.]

There being no other limit to God's mercy, it is easy to see,

II. To what it will extend—

This only excepted, every species and degree of sin may be forgiven. This blessed truth may be abundantly proved,

1. From Scripture examples—

[If we look at *sins committed before conversion*, we shall nor shall any thing further be done to call you to repentance.’ See Whitby's Dissertation on the subject.

^d 1 John v. 16.

^e 1 Tim. i. 13.

see that every species of enormity has been pardoned. What horrible *uncleanness* had the Corinthians been guilty of! yet they were washed, justified, and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God^f. Murders have in some instances been, not only committed, but multiplied: yet Manasseh, who, in addition to the most impious idolatries, had “filled the streets of Jerusalem with the blood of innocents,” was pardoned^g. *The persecuting of God’s Church and people* also, though it is like the “piercing of the apple of God’s eye,” has been forgiven: yea, Saul, the most furious of all zealots, was stopped in the midst of his outrages, and transformed into a blessed Apostle, in order that he might be an everlasting monument of the power and grace of Christ^h. To sum up all in one; *the very murder of the Son of God himself* has been forgiven; and thousands of those who cried out, “Crucify him, crucify him,” were converted in answer to that petition of our Lord, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

We may extend our observation also to *sins committed after conversion*. Who can contemplate without horror the conduct of David; who, though an eminent professor and patron of religion, defiled the wife of his faithful subject, and, in order to conceal his crime, laid a plot to destroy him? Consider him, I say, murdering this man who was exposing his life continually for his sake, murdering also a multitude of other persons together with him, involving another person in the guilt of all these murders as his instrument and accomplice, and making the very man, whose death he was contriving, the bearer of that letter, which was devoting him to destruction: consider him moreover, when he had accomplished his purpose, blasphemously ascribing the death of all these persons to Godⁱ, then instantly taking the adulterous Bathsheba to live with him as his wife; and, after all, living at least nine months in utter impenitence, as though he had committed no crime at all!! In an ignorant heathen, such conduct would have been inexpressibly vile; but in a saint of God, the man after God’s own heart—who would conceive it possible? To believe that such iniquity was ever committed, seems almost a libel upon human nature. Yet even this, surpassing as it does almost the bounds of credibility, was forgiven, and that too, upon the very first motion of penitence in David’s heart^k. Peter’s sin, if viewed in all its aggravations, was scarcely less than this: yet, even while he was committing it, our Lord looked on him with pity and compassion; and afterwards thrice repeated the commission, which restored him openly to his apostleship^l.]

^f 1 Cor. vi. 9—11.

^g 2 Kings xxi. 16. with 2 Chron. xxxiii. 9, 12, 13.

^h 1 Tim. i. 16. ⁱ 2 Sam. xi. 25. ^k 2 Sam. xii. 13.

^l John xxi. 15—17.

2. From Scripture declarations—

[Consult we *the Prophets*? They speak strongly on this point, declaring that we are redeemed from *all* sins, even those of a scarlet or crimson die^m. Ask we of *the Apostles*? They speak in terms of similar importⁿ, and contrast the Gospel with the law in this particular; that whereas there were some sins, for which there was no sacrifice appointed under the law of Moses, there is no iniquity whatever from which we may not be justified by the Gospel of Christ^o. If we attend to the voice of *Christ himself*, we shall find him no less explicit: he assures us that whosoever believeth in him shall never die, shall never be cast out^p. Thus universally do the Scriptures testify, that “*all manner of sin,*” yea, even the most horrid “blasphemies wherewith any man can blaspheme,” (except the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost) “shall be forgiven unto men.”

It must however be remembered, that these declarations suppose that we repent and believe the Gospel; for, without repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus, no sin whatever can be pardoned.]

Before we close, it will be proper to ADD,

1. A word of admonition—

[We hope and trust that there are not any in this day, who are guilty of the sin, which is here declared unpardonable: but many who scoff at religion, and deride the influences of the Spirit, may be much nearer to the commission of it than they imagine. It will be well for all such persons to pause, and consider on what a precipice they stand — — — for they may do despite to the Spirit of grace till they have quenched his sacred motions, and provoked him to abandon them to their own delusions. The Lord grant that none of us may bring down on ourselves such a tremendous judgment!]

2. A word of consolation—

[Some are tempted to think that they have committed the unpardonable sin: but if it be true, that the commission of it is always attended with judicial blindness, and followed by final impenitence, then no one can have committed it, who is apprehensive that he has been guilty of it: because, instead of indulging such fears, he would go on glorying in his shame, and hardening himself in his iniquities. Let all such apprehensions then be put away; and let that other declaration of the text abide upon our minds for our comfort and encouragement under all the accusations of a guilty conscience^a — — — O let all of us avail ourselves of this gracious declaration, whilst yet the proffered mercy lies within our reach — — —]

^m Isai. i. 18. ⁿ 1 John i. 7. and ii. 1, 2.

^p John xi. 26. and vi. 37.

^o Acts xiii. 38, 39.

^a Ps. cxxx. 7, 8.

MCCCLVI.

IDLE WORDS TO BE ACCOUNTED FOR.

Matt. xii. 36, 37. *I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment : for by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.*

THERE is not any plainer or more acknowledged truth, in relation to natural things, than that “a tree is known by its fruit.” In morals, the same would be equally obvious, if we were equally unbiassed in our judgment respecting it. But, if we speak of morals, we must not confine our attention to actions only : we must take also the words of men into the account ; since by them the heart betrays itself, no less than by overt acts. The communications which proceed from the heart will, of necessity, correspond with the treasures which abound in it ; even as a stream will manifest the quality of the fountain from whence it flows. Our blessed Lord has determined this point ; and grounded on it a most solemn declaration, that is of the utmost importance to every child of man : “A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth good things : and an evil man, out of the evil treasure, bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment : for by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”

To impress this declaration upon your minds, I will,

I. Explain it—

In explaining the Holy Scriptures, and especially such awful declarations as that before us, the utmost possible care must be taken to avoid too strict an interpretation on the one hand, or too lax an interpretation on the other. Respecting the precise import of the passage before us, a variety of opinions have been entertained ; some limiting it to the expressions which had been made use of by the Pharisees in the preceding context, whilst others extend it to the most

innocent communications in social and domestic life. The former of these enervate the force of the declaration altogether: the latter make it an occasion of continual distress to their own souls.

Let us first endeavour to ascertain what is meant by the expression, “every idle word”—

[I think we must confine the term to words which are in some respect *evil*: for it cannot be conceived that our blessed Lord should speak so strongly respecting words which were altogether innocent. Yet must the expression be very comprehensive, else such a declaration would scarcely have been made; since, respecting words that were palpably and grossly wicked, there could have been no doubt. I think, then, that we must comprehend under the term “idle words,” first, all that are *sinful in themselves*; next, all that are *sinful in their tendency*; and lastly, all that are *sinful in their source and origin*. The suggestions of the Pharisees respecting our blessed Lord were in the highest degree injurious to his character, and profanely impious towards God. And, as those were the immediate occasion of our Lord’s declaration, we are sure that every expression which pours contempt on religion, or inflicts any injury on man, must of necessity be numbered amongst the words which he intended to condemn. They bear confessedly, as all words that are false, or lewd, or profane, or scandalous, most evidently do, the stamp of sin upon them. But there are many words which do not wound the ear by any positive offensiveness, which yet are evil in the sight of God, because of their tendency to taint the mind, or pervert the judgment, of those who hear them. Amongst these I would rank all flattering words, which tend to puff up persons with pride and self-conceit. I should include also those facetious turns of wit which are calculated to convey to the mind ideas of an impure or licentious cast; such as the Apostle calls “foolish talking and jesting^a,” and which he declares to be altogether unsuited to the Christian character, and displeasing to God. Nor should I omit to mention eulogiums on the world, its pleasures, its riches, its honours, of which you hear so much in every place and company, and which lead the youthful mind into an opinion, that the world, if attained, can make us happy. Thousands, by means of such conversation, are betrayed into error, and hardened in sin; and brought, without being at all aware of it, to the brink of ruin, yea, to everlasting destruction, both of body and soul, in hell. I must however go one step further, and say, that whatever indicates

^a μωρολογία, ἡ ἐντραπείλια, Eph. v. 4.

evil in the heart, must be regarded as coming under the comprehensive expression of my text. Whatever is the offspring of pride, or envy, or malice, or vanity, or folly, or indifference to religion, in short, *whatever betrays a want of a religious principle within us*, must be denominated "idle." I think *this is the true distinction*. It is not necessary that in every word a religious principle should appear; but in no word should *the want of a religious principle* appear. There may be much that has no religion in it; there may be even what has not any kind of solidity in it, as the talking of a mother with her little child; which yet does not come under the description of "idle:" but every thing that betrays *a want of a religious principle* in the heart, whatever be its aspect in relation to other things, is wrong, and offensive in the sight of God.]

Now we are prepared to hear what the Lord has declared concerning it—

["Of every such word we must give account in the day of judgment." "There is not a word in our tongue, but God knoweth it altogether^b." "If the secrets of our heart will be made manifest" at the last day, much more will the words, by which they have found utterance, be scrutinized. They will be regarded as evidences of the internal state of our souls, especially so far as our words are evil: for it is but too true, that our words may be good, whilst yet our hearts are evil: but if our words be evil, there can remain no doubt whatever about the state of our hearts, from whence they flow: and, making due allowance for this distinction, "by our words we shall be justified, and by our words we shall be condemned." Not that this distinction is necessary, as it respects God: for the words that are hypocritical are, in God's sight, amongst the most hateful that we can possibly utter. It is only for the sake of avoiding misconception amongst men that I make this distinction. Men cannot know the heart; and therefore are constrained to hope well, wherever the appearances are favourable: but God sees the heart itself; and will pass his judgment according to what he beholds there. On the words, as far as they are indexes of the mind, he will pass his judgment: but when the words have conveyed what was not in the heart, he will judge, not according to the appearance, but righteous judgment, according to truth.]

Having endeavoured to ascertain the true import of this declaration, I will proceed to,

II. Point out the proper use to be made of it—

The peculiar solemnity with which the assertion

^b Ps. cxxxix. 4.

was made by our blessed Lord sufficiently shews of what vast importance it is. It was intended to operate forcibly on our minds: and it may well serve to direct us,

1. In the choice of our friends—

[We are particularly cautioned by Solomon “not to make any friendship with an angry man, lest we learn his ways.” And the same advice may well be given in reference to persons who “set not a watch before the door of their lips.” They will soon draw us into the same spirit with themselves; and, whether useful to us or not, in relation to worldly knowledge, they will never advance us in the knowledge of our God. They may, it is true, possess a talent in theology, as well as in other sciences: but they will never bring us to God, but will prevail rather to draw us from him, and to lower our habits of piety to their own standard. Conversation, properly used, is a most valuable ordinance. In truth, “death and life are in the power of the tongue^c,” seeing that by its counsels, we may be stirred up to seek the Lord, or may be deterred from following the convictions of our own minds: so true is that assertion of Solomon, “He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed^d.”]

2. In the regulation of our own intercourse with men—

[Speech is a talent that is to be improved for the Lord: and of it we must give account, as well as of any other talent we possess. If any man ask, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” I answer, Yes, you are; so far, at least, as not to let him wander out of the way, when you have an opportunity to set him right: and if you neglect to avail yourselves of the opportunity that is afforded you, you are as much answerable for his blood, as you would be if you saw him on the brink of a precipice, and neglected to warn him of his danger. “The tongue is a tree of life;” and you should freely dispense its fruits to those who are within your reach. In this view, the Psalmist repeatedly called his tongue “his glory^e,” for by that he could both exalt God in private, and commend him to others in public: and, consequently, if we suffer our tongue to keep silence, or to prate about foolish things when we should be speaking for the Lord, we bury our talent in a napkin, and sink ourselves to a level with them that know not God. And must we not give account of such conduct to the Lord? I say then, “Let your conversation be alway with grace, *seasoned with salt*^f.”

^c Prov. xviii. 21.

^d Prov. xiii. 20.

^e Ps. xvi. 9. and xxx. 12.

^f Col. iv. 6.

It is not necessary that you should eat salt by handfuls, if I may use so homely an expression, or that you should be always talking of religion: but your speech should at all times be *seasoned* with salt; and your intercourse, even about the most common things, should be such as to shew that religion is the one spring of all your actions, and the governing principle of your whole lives. In this way you will approve yourselves to God as good and faithful servants; and under that character will you be acknowledged by him in the day of judgment.]

3. In the forming of a just estimate of our character before God—

[Our *actions* will not suffice for this; but our *words* will. To have our outward conduct blameless is an easy thing, in comparison of what it is to have our words rightly directed for the glory of God and the good of men. The heart will be pouring forth that which is contained in it. And accordingly we find, that worldly characters, whether male or female, however exemplary they may be in their outward conduct, rarely speak any thing but about the world. They have no disposition to converse about the things of God: they have no heart to praise the Saviour, or to commend him to the love of their fellow-men. Perhaps, during the course of their whole lives, with scarcely any exception, their communications with others have been earthly and carnal; and in this respect they have far more resembled the ungodly world than the saints of God. But, if we bear in mind this declaration of our Lord, and consider its aspect upon us, we shall tremble for our appearance before him. Look well to it then, brethren, that “no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers^g.”]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have been inattentive to their words—

[The generality say, “Our lips are our own: who is Lord over us^h?” But know, that “ye are not your own: ye are bought with a price:” and all your faculties, whether of mind or body, are the Lord’s: so that you are bound to “glorify him with your body and your spirit, which are hisⁱ.” I call upon you, then, to watch with all possible care against light and unprofitable conversation of every kind: and endeavour, with all earnestness, to improve your own minds for the purpose of instructing others, and to convey to all within your reach that knowledge which shall “make men wise unto salvation, through faith that is in Christ Jesus.”]

^g Eph. iv. 29.

^h Ps. xii. 4.

ⁱ 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

2. Those who have endeavoured to improve their speech for the good of others—

[This declaration of God is as consolatory to you, as it is alarming to the careless and ungodly world. Never have you endeavoured to speak for God, but God has listened to it with pleased attention, and recorded it in the book of his remembrance, that you may “be justified” in his sight, and have a place assigned to you amongst the jewels of his crown^k. The saints, too, shall then bear their testimony also in your behalf. One will say, ‘He taught me, when a child, the first principles of Christianity, and was, under God, the means of leading me to the knowledge of the truth.’ Another will say, ‘He visited me in the hour of sickness, and instructed me, and guided me into all truth: and to him, under God, I owe the salvation of my soul.’ Thus, both from God and man, will you have most blessed testimonies at the bar of judgment, and receive a proportionable measure both of bliss and glory to all eternity.]

^k Mal. iii. 16, 17.

MCCCLVII.

JONAH A TYPE OF CHRIST.

Matt. xii. 39—41. *But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the Prophet Jonas. For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.*

UNREASONABLE and wicked men are ready to complain of want of evidence, when they neither attentively consider the means of conviction, that are afforded them, nor act agreeably to the convictions, that are already impressed upon their minds. This was eminently the character of the Jews in our Lord's days. They had a right indeed to expect, that their religion, which had been confirmed by so many miracles, should not be superseded by any religion, which did not exhibit the same credentials. But the miracles wrought by our Lord were so numerous, so plain, and evident, that his enemies, unable to question the reality of them, ascribed them to the agency of

Satan. Yet the Jews still demanded of him a sign, and, to satisfy their incredulity, he must give them “a sign from heaven^a.” It is to persons of this description that our Lord replies in the words before us; telling them, that no different kind of sign should be given them, till his resurrection; and, that the repenting Ninevites would in the last day condemn their obstinacy and unbelief.

The text naturally leads us to shew,

I. Wherein Jonah was a type of Christ—

Whatever agreement there is between the histories of Jonah and of Christ; the *leading* points, wherein the former typified our Lord, are two:

1. His miraculous restoration to dry land after having been three days confined in the belly of a fish—

[This was doubtless a wonderful event; that he should be preserved three days in the belly of a fish, *unhurt*; and that, after so long a continuance in that situation, the fish, which seemed destined for his destruction, should be the instrument of his preservation! To this, under God, we must ascribe the efficacy of his word at Nineveh; for our Lord tells us, that, by this means, he was made “a sign to the Ninevites.” What means they had of ascertaining the fact itself, we do not exactly know; but they evidently had not the smallest doubt respecting the truth of it; and therefore they received his message as coming immediately from God.

Now in this he was evidently a type of Christ. Our Lord having, like Jonah, been voluntarily delivered up to death for the salvation of others, was confined in the heart of the earth. The term of his imprisonment there was the same with that of Jonah’s continuance in the fish’s belly; yet *he* “*saw no corruption*,” and, at the appointed time, he burst the bands of death (of which it was not possible he should be holden) and thus became a sign to the Jewish nation^b. On this he laid the whole stress of his Messiahship, while he was yet ministering among his countrymen; and, after the event had taken place, he gave so many, and such convincing, evidences of the fact, as to leave no possibility of doubt respecting his divine mission: this therefore was made the very corner-stone of Christianity; and his sending down of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost in consequence of his resurrection, was such “a sign from heaven” as must leave unbelievers without excuse to all eternity.]

^a Luke xi. 16, 29.

^b Luke xi. 30.

2. His successful preaching consequent upon it—

[The effect of Jonah's preaching stands perhaps unrivalled from the foundation of the world. The large and populous city instantly received the word, and, though Gentiles by nature, began to call upon Jehovah; so that, from the king upon his throne to the very meanest of his subjects, they all humbled themselves before him in sackcloth and ashes: nor did they cease from their cries, till the wrath of God was averted from them.

And must not this event lead our minds to Jesus, who is no less "a light to lighten the Gentiles, than he is the glory of his people Israel?" His ministry among the Jews indeed was attended with small success, though ultimately "they shall be again engrafted on their own stock:" but how rapid, how extensive, has been the effect of his word among the Gentiles! Many myriads have already turned from idols to serve the living and true God: and in due season the whole Gentile world shall flock to his standard^c, and "all flesh behold the salvation of God."]

But notwithstanding this honour put upon Jonah, it will be proper to notice,

II. His inferiority to him whom he typified—

Though we are disposed to cast a veil over the infirmities of God's servants, yet the peculiarity of Jonah's character, no less than the very words of the text, requires that his inferiority to the Saviour should be strongly marked. We may observe it,

1. In his office and character—

[Jonah was indeed a prophet of the Most High God; but he had as great corruptions as could well consist with a converted state. The whole of his conduct, from first to last, indicated a proud, peevish, discontented, uncharitable, and rebellious disposition; so that it is even a great stretch of charity to believe that he had any piety at all. But the blessed Jesus was free from every species and degree of sin; and was no other than the Messiah himself, even the very Son of God, "Jehovah's Fellow," "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person." Methinks, therefore, he did not arrogate much to himself, when he said, "Behold, a greater than Jonas is here."]

2. In his manner of executing his office—

^c Isai. xi. 10.

[Jonah executed the prophetic office among the ten tribes^d; but we know nothing of his spirit, except from the book which bears his name. And here we see, that he did not enter on his office without great reluctance, fleeing from God, in order to avoid an embassy, which he was afraid would be attended with personal danger or disgrace. When he was in the midst of the storm, which endangered the vessel wherein he was sailing, he, a professor of the true religion, he, a prophet of Jehovah, he, who was the occasion of the storm, was sleeping, while the heathen sailors were crying to their gods; and he was reproached for his supineness by the very heathens themselves^e. After God himself had interposed to mark him as the occasion of the storm, so that he could conceal his guilt no longer, he confessed his wickedness, and acknowledged to the crew, that the only way of saving the ship, was, to cast him overboard. This done, a fish was prepared to swallow him; and constrained to deliver him safely upon dry land. After this, we might hope, he had attained a better spirit; but alas! though compelled to deliver his message, he preferred his own honour before the salvation of a million souls; instead of once interceding for them, he waited with anxious expectation to see his word fulfilled, and even quarrelled with God for extending his mercy to them^f.

How different was the conduct of our adorable Jesus! He willingly left the bosom of his Father, to become a messenger to our guilty world^g. So far from wishing to avoid disgrace or danger, he gladly submitted to the accursed death of the cross, and “*gave his own life a ransom for many.*” Instead of sleeping while others prayed, he continued whole nights in prayer for those, who were insensible of their danger; and, instead of grieving at the salvation of those who received him, he wept over the impenitence of those who rejected him^h. All concern for himself was lost in his concern for others. And his restoration to life, which was *effected by his own almighty power*, was made the means of more abundant and effectual exertions on behalf of those to whom he was sent. And the more his efforts were crowned with success, the more did he glorify God on the behalf of those who obtained mercy.]

3. In the success with which he executed it—

[Jonah prevailed to the *outward reformation and temporal preservation*, of one single city — — But Jesus does, and will, prevail to the *spiritual renovation, and everlasting salvation* of a whole world — — How exalted is he in this view, and how worthy of our highest praise!]

^d 2 Kings xiv. 25.

^e Jonah i. 5, 6.

^f Jonah iv. 2—5.

^g Ps. xl. 7—9.

^h Luke xix. 41.

We may OBSERVE from this subject,

1. How certainly is Christ the true Messiah!

[The Ninevites knew for certain the divine mission of Jonah, by means of his miraculous deliverance from the fish's belly. How evidently then is "Christ declared to be the Son of God with power by his resurrection from the deadⁱ!" Let then every word of his, by whomsoever it be delivered, "be received, not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, the word of God — — —"]

2. How inexcusable are they, who continue impenitent under the preaching of the Gospel!

[Jonah simply denounced the vengeance of God against the Ninevites, without making them any offer of mercy, or even intimating, that there was any possibility that the sentence might be reversed; yea, and without so much as working one single miracle in confirmation of his word: yet they, though heathens, trembled at the very first denunciations of God's wrath, and set themselves to repent and turn from their sins, upon the slightest hope that *peradventure* God might turn from his fierce anger^k. How then ought *we* to seek the Lord, who have not merely temporal ruin, but eternal condemnation, denounced against us; who, besides this, have promises of mercy also set before us, to encourage our repentance; and both the threatenings and the promises confirmed by ten thousand miracles! Surely "the Ninevites will rise up in judgment against us at the last day, if we continue obdurate" under such means as are used to reclaim us.]

3. How certainly may they expect mercy, who repent and believe in Christ!

[We have no reason to think, that the repentance of the Ninevites was genuine and abiding: it is more probable that it resembled that of Ahab, both in its nature and duration^l. Still, however, it was the means of preserving all of them from the threatened calamities. And shall not true repentance, accompanied with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, avail for the salvation of our souls? Will that God, whom Jonah reproached for the unbounded extent of his grace and mercy, "cast out any who come to him by Jesus Christ^m?" We need not fear: it is not a *peradventure*, but a certainty, that God "will save them to the uttermost." Let us then seek the Lord in his appointed way, that we may be monuments of his mercy to all eternity.]

ⁱ Rom. i. 4.

^k Jonah iii. 5—9

^l 1 Kings xxi. 27—29.

^m John vi. 37.

MCCCLVIII.

THE RELAPSED DÆMONIAC.

Matt. xii. 43—45. *When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.*

THOUGH the general scope of the parables is, for the most part, plain and obvious, it is often difficult to see the precise meaning of some circumstances contained in them. This is the case with the parable before us; the minuter incidents of which may possibly be considered as ornamental; but I think rather that they are essential parts of the parable itself^a. Its import, on the whole, suggests the following observations:

I. Persons, once delivered from Satan, are again open to his assaults—

Satan certainly has power over the hearts of men—

[There is much ascribed to his agency in the holy Scriptures. He blinds the eyes of all unbelievers^b — — — and rules in all their hearts^c — — — Though he has not the same power over men's bodies as he once had, he evidently possesses their souls, and drives them to perdition^d—]

^a Our Lord had cast out a devil; and this was by the Pharisees imputed to a confederacy with Beelzebub. After shewing the absurdity of such a notion, he contrasted their state with that of the Ninevites and the Queen of Sheba; and compared them to a relapsed dæmoniac, who would be in a worse state than if Satan had never gone out of him at all. Now what is here spoken respecting the unclean spirit, we must interpret of Satan, ejected from the Jews, and going in *dry*, that is, unfrequented places, or places *not watered by the Gospel*, to find rest among the Gentiles; and, upon being pursued thither by the preaching of the Apostles, returning to take more full possession of the Jews than ever; since, however reformed some of them might be, they were, as a nation, perfectly prepared, through their inveterate lusts and prejudices, to receive him.

^b 2 Cor. iv. 4. ^c Eph. ii. 2. ^d Mark ix. 22. with John viii. 44.

But he often loses his dominion through the preaching of the Gospel—

[Paul was commissioned to turn men from the power of Satan unto God^e: and the weapon whereby he rescued them from his dominion was the Gospel^f. The same divine energy also attends it, when used by us^g — — — Though conversions are more rare than in the Apostles' days, they are not less real.]

Yet they who have been delivered from him, are still open to his assaults—

[How often did he repeat his attacks on Peter^h! With what envious malice did he buffet Paulⁱ! How did he renew his attempts even on Christ himself^k! Thus he still watches for his opportunity to destroy us^l — — — Nor shall we be wholly out of his reach, till we are finally discharged from our warfare^m.]

We had need therefore to watch against this subtle enemy; for,

II. If we be a second time subjected to Satan's dominion, our last state will be worse than the first—

It is certain that Satan can never finally prevail against the elect—

[This is evidently implied in the character which is given of themⁿ. The promises of God also ensure to them the victory over him^o. Hence they are authorized to defy all the powers of darkness^p.]

They, into whom he may return, are described in the text—

[The true children of God desire to be ever “filled with the Spirit;” nor will they suffer the things that please Satan to abide quietly in their hearts; but self-deceivers are satisfied, like Herod, with a partial change^q, and continue with their old affections and lusts unmortified^r. Judas, Ananias, Demas, no doubt retained their love of this world. Hence Satan found their hearts “swept” indeed, and “emptied” of gross sin, but

^e Acts xxvi. 18.

^f 2 Cor. x. 4.

^g 2 Tim. ii. 25, 26.

^h Matt. xvi. 23. Luke xxii. 31.

ⁱ 2 Cor. xii. 7.

^k Compare Luke iv. 13. John xiv. 30. Luke xxii. 53.

^l 1 Pet. v. 8.

^m Eph. vi. 11, 12.

ⁿ 1 John ii. 13, 14. and v. 18.

^o Rom. xvi. 20.

^p Rom. viii. 38, 39.

^q Mark vi. 20.

^r Ps. lxxviii. 36, 37.

still *furnished* for his reception^s — — — Wherever this is the case, he will surely, however expelled for a season, return ere long with increased power.]

On his return to them their state will be worse than ever—

[The Holy Spirit will be grieved, provoked, quenched^t; and when once men are “beguiled from the simplicity that is in Christ,” their minds will be more closed against the truth than ever. Their consciences will be silenced, and made callous^u. Their evil habits also will return, and gain an irresistible dominion; and the deliverance, which they have neglected to improve, will fearfully aggravate their final condemnation^x.]

INQUIRE—

1. Whether ye have ever yet been delivered from Satan—

[Perhaps many doubt whether they have ever been possessed by Satan; but this alone is sufficient to prove, that they are yet under his dominion. That usurper reigns in all till he is vanquished and expelled by Jesus Christ; and it is only in answer to fervent prayer, that the adorable Saviour puts forth his power to drive him out. Examine then whether ye have ever thus resisted Satan, and obtained deliverance from him through the power and grace of Christ.]

2. Be daily maintaining a strict watch against him—

[If he has been cast out of us, he is seeking an opportunity to return; nor can he be kept away, but by constant prayer and watchfulness. Let us then guard every avenue of our hearts. Let us implore the aid of our divine inhabitant. The exertion of our own powers in dependence on the intercession and grace of Christ, will ensure us a successful issue of the conflict^y.]

^s Many there are who embrace the Gospel, and experience its power so far as to turn them from open gross sin; but they afterwards imbibe false doctrines, or engage in matters of doubtful disputation; and thus change their outward lusts for others that are still more malignant, such as superstition, pride, bigotry, intolerance. Their service is different; but their Master is the same; and their dispositions invite the return of Satan as strongly as the most inveterate lusts could do.

^t Eph. iv. 30. Isai. lxiii. 10. 1 Thess. v. 19. ^u 1 Tim. iv. 2.

^x 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21.

^y Jam. iv. 7. with Luke xxii. 31, 32.

MCCCLIX.

CHRIST'S REGARD TO HIS OBEDIENT FOLLOWERS.

Matt. xii. 46—50. *While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren: for whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother^a.*

IT is not easy, engaged as we are in a variety of callings, to know at all times what is the duty of the present moment. Seasons may often occur when a tradesman may reasonably doubt whether he ought to be in his shop or in his closet: and it may sometimes be difficult to know exactly where to draw the line between the attentions due to earthly relatives and the higher duties of God's more immediate service. The example, however, which Christ has set us, may be of considerable use in regulating our conduct on such occasions. He was in a house teaching a great multitude of people who flocked around him: and his mother and his near kinsmen, apprehensive, perhaps, that he might provoke his enemies to destroy him, or that he would injure his own health by his incessant labours, endeavoured to get access to him, that they might persuade him to suspend his exertions. Not being able to get near him for the crowd, they called to him, and prevailed on the intermediate multitudes to inform him, that they stood without, greatly desirous to speak with him. On the message being delivered, our blessed Lord "looked round about on his surrounding audience," and, "stretching

^a Another on nearly the same words, (Mark iii. 31—35,) had some time before been written. The author, not adverting to that circumstance, composed this. On a comparison of the two, they are so exceedingly different, that, without altering a word in either, they are both presented to the public, in hope that they may be profitable, as illustrating different modes of treating the same text.

forth his hand" towards them, made use of the extraordinary language of our text:—in considering which, we shall shew,

I. In what light our Lord regarded his obedient followers—

We are sure, that, in asking, "Who is my mother or my brethren," he did not intend to act towards them with any disrespect: he only intended to declare the infinitely greater respect which he had for practical piety than for any other thing whatever; and to shew,

1. That his obedient followers were the exclusive objects of his regard—

[Doubtless, as a man, he felt the ties of consanguinity, and (most probably too) the partialities of friendship^b: but as the Mediator between God and man, who was appointed to judge the world, he considered nothing deserving his notice but a conformity to the will of God. A mere profession of his religion was so far from recommending any person to his favour, that it rendered him tenfold the more hateful in his eyes, if it were not accompanied with a suitable practice^c. He compares such a person to a man building his house upon the sand, which is sure to fall and overwhelm him in its ruins: and he assures us, that, in the last day, whatever zeal such an one may have shewn even in propagating the truth itself, he will utterly disown him as unworthy of the smallest regard^d. The person whom alone he will approve, is the conscientious and devoted servant of God, who does the will of God *cheerfully, constantly, and without reserve*. The obedience of a slave, were it ever so extensive, would be unacceptable to him, because it proceeds not from love. Nor, if we could conceive a person to obey from love, would his services be pleasing to God, if they were only occasional; because it would prove, that sin retained an allowed ascendancy over the soul. Nor, for the same reason, could the most uniform obedience be approved by him, if there were so much as one single lust spared, or one single duty wilfully neglected. An eye, a hand, a foot, retained in opposition to the line of duty, would occasion the whole body to be cast into hell^e. But "*whosoever*" is truly upright in doing the will, the whole will, of God, "that person," whatever other recommendations he may want, shall certainly be an object of his peculiar regard: "Then are ye my disciples, if ye do whatsoever I command you."]

^b We suppose his peculiar love to John was of this kind.

^c Luke vi. 46.

^d Matt. vii. 21—27.

^e Mark ix. 43—48.

2. That there was no honour or happiness which he would not confer upon them—

[All are agreed, that, in a temporal view, the most honoured and blessed of all the human race was the Virgin Mary. Yet far more honoured, and more blessed, are all who cordially fulfil the will of God. This our Lord himself affirms^f: and, in the text, he seems almost to disclaim relationship to her, as it were, in comparison of those closer bonds which unite him to his obedient followers.]

But it is not merely the names of brother, sister, mother, that we are to regard: we must consider what is implied in those terms: what ardent love to their persons; what constant attention to their wants; what a liberal supply of their necessities; what familiar intercourse with them at all seasons; what protection against dangers; and what glorious triumph he will give them over all their enemies. We must consider too, that when the relations that were formed by flesh and blood shall exist no longer, then shall these spiritual relations be still acknowledged, and all the blessings attached to them be continued through eternal ages.]

This being a matter not of speculation merely, but of great practical importance, let us consider,

II. The inferences to be deduced from it—

And here we cannot but observe, that if Christ so highly regards his obedient followers, then should we,

1. Honour them—

[The light of the godly has ever been so offensive to the lovers of darkness, that all possible methods have been used to veil its lustre, if not to extinguish it altogether. Who needs be told that there ever have been, and are at this day, terms of reproach, whereby to designate the obedient followers of Christ; and that they who are most active and diligent in his service usually bear the greatest share of that reproach? Even persons not wholly destitute of religious feeling, are yet often so awed by the fear of man, that they dare not own their respect for the godly, or even notice them as their acquaintance. They can hear the most eminent of God's servants calumniated, and never open their mouths in their defence; and they can even wish and long for their instructions, and not dare to put themselves in the way of receiving them. But what a horrible impiety is this; that the very thing which so endears them to Christ, should render them odious to us; or that we should be ashamed to call *them* friends whom "Christ is not

^f Luke xi. 27, 28.

ashamed to call his brethren!" Little do such contemners think *whom* they despise; or such timid Christians, of *whom* they are ashamed. Paul had no idea that he was darting his shafts at Jesus, when he was persecuting, what he would call, some enthusiastic heretics: but Jesus said to him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou ME?" So it is now: they who receive his servants, receive him; and they who despise them, despise him. Beware then, lest ye provoke the Lord to be "ashamed of you in the presence of his Father and his holy angels." And as Paul said to Timothy, "Be not ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner," so would I say to you, Be not ashamed of the Gospel, nor of any of those who obey it: but, as Christ honours his people, so do ye honour them, not in word only, but in deed and in truth. Be willing "to suffer affliction with them, and esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of the world."]

2. Seek to be of their number—

[Who would not wish that in the day of judgment Christ should say of him, That is my brother, my sister, my mother? What then must we do, in order to secure that blessing? Doubtless we must believe in Christ, and seek "to be found in him, not having our own righteousness, but his." But though it is by faith, and by faith only, that we are united to Christ, and made members of his family, yet must we be found doing the will of God, or else we can never be found in the number of his people. "The grace of God that bringeth salvation teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live righteously, soberly, and godly, in the world." Is it asked, What is the will of God? I answer briefly, first, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification^g;" and secondly, "Rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, and in every thing give thanks; for this also is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you^h." Here are two things, a *holy* and a *heavenly* life. All the lusts of the flesh must be mortified, all the evil tempers and dispositions subdued, and "the thoughts, as well as the actions, be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." This is a *holy* life. But besides that, you must be brought into a state of unfeigned, and, as it were, habitual delight in God, praying to him for all you want, praising him for all you enjoy, and glorying in him as your God and portion for evermore. This is a *heavenly* life. And by these two things you will discover your relation to Christ: the family likeness, if I may so speak, will be visible upon you. Let these things then be found upon you; for on them all your salvation depends. Your creed will signify nothing; your profession, nothing;

^g 1 Thess. iv. 3.

^h 1 Thess. v. 16—18.

your practice, nothing, without these : in his family "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free : but Christ, that is, *the image of Christ upon your soul*, is all and in allⁱ."]

3. Choose them for your companions—

[Very few people have an idea how much of their present welfare and of their eternal prospects depends upon their associates and friends. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise," says Solomon ; "but a companion of fools shall be destroyed^k." Again, "Make no friendship with an angry man, lest thou learn his ways^l." For the same reason I would say, associate not with a proud man, a worldly man, a covetous man, a lewd man : for it is certain that "evil communications will corrupt good manners." We almost unavoidably drink into the spirit of our companions : we adopt their sentiments ; we conform to their practice ; we become cast into their mould. Of what infinite importance then is it that we should associate with those whose sentiments and conduct accord with the mind of Christ ? This was the conduct of the saints of old : David says, "I am a companion of all them that fear thee and that keep thy precepts^m." He calls them, "the excellent of the earth," and says, "that in them is all his delightⁿ." "He would not so much as know a wicked person^o." This is the conduct which becomes the friends and brethren of Christ : for "what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness, or light with darkness, or Christ with Belial ?" Come out, therefore, from among the ungodly world, and be separate from them^p." "Christ was not of the world, neither must ye be^q:" for "the friendship of the world is enmity with God ;" and "if ye will be the friends of the world, you must to all eternity continue the enemies of God^r." If you would ever be acknowledged by Christ as his brethren, "be ye as he was, and let his people be your people^s," his friends your friends, his brethren your brethren.]

4. Do them all the good in your power—

[It is the duty of a Christian to lay out himself in acts of kindness towards all, in imitation of Him who "went about doing good," and of Him who "sendeth rain on the evil and on the good, on the just and on the unjust." But still there is a special obligation upon him to seek the welfare of the

ⁱ Col. iii. 11. Read the whole chapter without prejudice, and you will certainly find this to be the true sense of the passage.

^k Prov. xiii. 20.

^l Prov. xxii. 24, 25.

^m Ps. cxix. 63.

ⁿ Ps. xvi. 3.

^o Ps. ci. 4.

^p 2 Cor. vi. 14—17.

^q John xvii. 14, 16.

^r Jam. iv. 4.

^s 1 Kings xxii. 4. and 2 Kings iii. 7.

Lord's people: "Do good unto all men," says the Apostle, "but *especially* unto them that are of *the household of faith*." Let us suppose for one moment that amongst a multitude of persons in distress we spied the Virgin Mary herself; can we doubt whom we should select as the first object of our attention? Or is there one amongst us that would not gladly deny himself some little comforts to relieve her necessities? Should we not feel it our bounden duty to shew kindness to one who was so nearly related to the Lord Jesus Christ? Behold, then, this we may do at any time. He tells us where we may find his mother and his brethren. Is there a pious person languishing in this cottage or yonder workhouse? "*That same*" is his brother, or sister, or mother. In ministering to such, you do, in fact, minister to Christ himself; as he has said, "Whatsoever ye have done unto the least of *these my brethren*, ye have done it unto me." Search out then the pious few, wherever they may be found; and account it an honour to minister unto them. Are they hungry? feed them; are they naked? clothe them; are they sick or in prison? go and visit them. Are their troubles of a spiritual nature? "lift up the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees; and say to them that are of a fearful heart, Fear not; behold, your God will come and save you." Sometimes perhaps your dearest friends may endeavour to damp your ardour in these holy exercises; but beware how you suffer yourselves to be diverted from such blessed employments. Doubtless there are other duties which demand a great portion of your attention: but whilst you are "diligent in business, be also fervent in spirit, serving the Lord."]

MCCCLX.

THE USE AND INTENT OF PARABLES.

Matt. xiii. 13—15. *Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing, see not; and hearing, they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive. For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.*

IT is certain that parabolical representations are, for the most part, obscure, and difficult to be understood. It may well therefore be a subject of inquiry,

why our blessed Lord adopted that method of instructing his auditors, in preference to a plain undisguised declaration of the truth? This very question was agitated among his own disciples, who not being able to satisfy themselves respecting it, entreated an answer from himself upon the point^a. The reply which our Lord made to it is the subject of our present consideration. We shall,

I. Explain the general import of the text—

The Jews in our Lord's time were extremely averse to receive instruction—

[Never were any people more blinded by prejudice than they: they heard our Lord only with a view to cavil at his word; and asked questions of him only that they might ensnare him; and though they were constrained to acknowledge that he spake as never man spake, they would not receive his testimony. They saw his word confirmed by numerous, and most stupendous miracles; and yet, instead of yielding to conviction, they were always asking for more signs. Rather than confess the hand of God in the wonders wrought by him, they ascribed them to the devil: and when that refuge failed them, they sought to destroy both him and Lazarus, lest his having raised the dead should induce the people to believe on him. The instant they saw the drift of his discourses, they accused him of opposing the law of Moses, and of blasphemy against God. In short, they shut their eyes against the light, and determinately resisted all the methods used for their conversion and salvation.]

They exactly accorded with the description long before given of them by the prophet—

[The words of the prophet in their *literal* sense, were an order to him to go and preach to the people, though he was apprised beforehand that they would not listen to him, or be converted by him. But they looked forward also to the times of the Gospel, and were a prophecy, that when Christ and his Apostles should preach to the Jews, the greater part of the nation being blinded by their own prejudices and passions, would determinately set themselves against the truth. In this sense the words were applied by St. Paul to those who rejected his ministry^b; and in this sense our Lord represents them as accomplished in his hearers.]

^a ver. 10.

^b Acts xxviii. 25—27.

It was this state of their minds that induced him to adopt the plan of teaching them by parables—

[The people shut their eyes against plain truths; and therefore our Lord taught them in an obscure way.

But here arises a question; was the people's blindness *a reason* for our Lord's teaching them by parables? or, was our Lord's teaching them by parables *the intentional cause* of their blindness? Did he so teach them *because they were blind*? or did he so teach them, *in order to make them blind*?

Beyond a doubt, the former of these positions seems more consonant with the general character of our Lord. But the more obvious construction of his words seems rather to favour the latter sentiment.

The language of prophecy is sometimes exceeding strong; and the prophets are said to *do*, what they only foretell as certainly to happen^c; consequently, when the prophecies are quoted, they are frequently to be understood in rather a lower sense than the words at first sight appear to bear. Accordingly the prophecy as quoted by our Lord represents him as speaking to the people in parables, *not on purpose to blind them*, but with the lamentable prospect of their rejecting his message, and of their shutting their eyes, as if they were afraid of seeing the light, and of being converted by it.

Yet there is an objection to this solution, namely, that both St. Mark and St. Luke make our Lord speak directly an opposite language^d. But to this we answer, that neither of these evangelists expressly quotes the prophecy, as St. Matthew does: they only allude to it; and therefore may be considered rather as using the words in an accommodated sense. And indeed St. Mark's own declaration in ver. 33. that "with many such parables spake he the word unto them, *as they were able to hear it*," shews clearly, that what he before spake in allusion to the prophecy, must be understood in a sense that can be reconciled with the declaration itself: for otherwise there would be an absolute contradiction between his two assertions. But they perfectly accord with each other, if we interpret the former as importing, that our Lord spake to the people in parables, that they might see (sufficient to instruct them) and not perceive (the full drift of his discourses, which would make them only turn away from him in disgust) *if peradventure*^e he might

^c Jer. i. 10. Ezek. xliii. 3. ^d Mark iv. 11, 12. and Luke viii. 10.

^e Here the translation of the word *μήποτε*, upon which the whole depends, is altered from *lest*, to *if peradventure*. But it occurs in a parallel passage, where it is actually so translated, and where, unless it were so rendered, there would be no sense at all. See 2 Tim. ii. 25. Indeed, if it be not so translated in St. Mark, our Lord must be understood to say, that he preached unintelligibly to them *for fear they*

(by this cautious method of instructing them) convert and save their souls.

Thus there was in this way of teaching, something favourable, and something judicial. The people set themselves against the truth; *therefore* our Lord withheld his plainer instructions from them: but he did so, not with a view to increase, but rather to remove, their blindness.]

Having fixed the meaning of the text itself, we proceed, in answer to the Apostles' question, to,

II. State more particularly our Lord's reasons for teaching by parables—

In the whole of his ministry our Lord was influenced by benevolence. More especially in addressing the people by parables, he sought,

1. To counteract their prejudices—

[They were determined to reject every thing that opposed their prejudices, or their passions, and on no account to admit the idea of a suffering Messiah. The only way therefore of bringing them to acknowledge any truth, was to present it to them in such a view that they should not discern its real scope. When they saw the bearing of any question that was put to them, they would not return an answer^f: but, when they could see no reference to themselves, they answered readily enough^g: and by this means they were often made to criminate themselves before they perceived the tendency of their own acknowledgments^h. As David in the parable of the ewe lamb condemned with most excessive severity a conduct somewhat similar to his own, and thereby pronounced sentence against himself, when he would have denied or extenuated his guilt, if it had been charged home upon him in a more open way; so, by taking them unawares, our Lord often succeeded in confounding, and sometimes in converting, those, who would have rejected his testimony at once, if they had observed at first the full scope of his instructions.]

2. To prepare them for fuller instructions—

[Our Lord was willing to impart knowledge, if the people had been capable of receiving it: but it was necessary that they who had lived in such gross darkness, should be brought

should be converted. But surely, this is a motive which we would not willingly ascribe to him, especially when his words so easily admit of a very different interpretation.

^f Matt. xxi. 23—27.

^g Luke vii. 43.

^h Matt. xxi. 28—32. and xxii. 41—46.

gradually to the light, lest they should be overpowered by too hasty a transition to the full radiance of Gospel truth. He told even his own disciples, that he had many things to say unto them; but was constrained to withhold them for the present, because of their incapacity to receive themⁱ: he thought it proper to educate them as children, that he might gradually inform their minds, and mature their judgment. And this was the intent also of all his public ministrations; he administered milk to the people as babes, that they might, when grown to full age, be nourished by the strong meat which he intended afterwards to set before them.]

3. To render them without excuse if they should reject his word—

[Had his instructions been unseasonably clear and full, the people might have cast some reflection on their teacher as injudicious. But when he so condescended to their weakness, “they had no cloke for their sin;” they were altogether without excuse; and it was manifest beyond a doubt, that the only reason of their rejecting him was, that “they loved darkness rather than light^k.” The judgments that were to be brought upon them, were such as never had been experienced from the foundation of the world: this opportunity therefore of filling up the measure of their iniquities was given to the people of that generation, that the equity of the Divine procedure might be more manifest in their destruction.]

Let us LEARN from hence,

1. The folly and danger of prejudice in those who hear the Gospel—

[Such is the force of prejudice that it will blind the eyes, and shut the ears, and make the heart impenetrably hard. Yet how many indulge it without being at all aware of their danger! They have taken up the notion that salvation by faith is injurious to morality, and that vital godliness is enthusiasm; and will receive nothing that militates against their preconceived opinions. But let the fate of the Jews convince us of the folly and danger of such conduct: and let us seek from God that “honest and good heart,” that shall embrace with readiness, and improve with care, whatever God has revealed in his word.]

2. The need of wisdom in those who minister the Gospel—

[Much harm has been done to the interests of religion by an unguarded declaration even of the truth itself. Men should

ⁱ John xvi. 12.

^k John iii. 19.

be considered as having prejudices which may be increased by indiscretion, or undermined by a prudent exhibition of the Gospel. St. Paul, though as far as any man from a want of zeal, was peculiarly attentive to this duty¹; and has left us instructions respecting it for the regulation of our own conduct^m. The end of the ministry is to convert and save the souls of men: and whatever is best adapted to that end, is most worthy of our pursuit. No one should conceal the truth through the fear of man; nor should any one be backward to put a veil upon his face, when the brightness of it would defeat the end of his ministrations. Zeal and prudence should be duly combined in those to whom the care of souls is committed; and if in this respect we imitate our Lord and his Apostles, we may reasonably hope that we shall not run in vain, or labour in vain.]

¹ Acts xx. 20. 1 Cor. iii. 1, 2.

^m Heb. v. 12—14.

MCCCLXI.

THE SOWER.

Matt. xiii. 18. *Hear ye the parable of the sower.*

THE word of God, by whomsoever delivered, makes a different impression on different people. When our Lord himself preached, his discourses did not carry conviction to all: nor did his Apostles find that all would receive the truths declared by them. Thus, in this day, there is a great diversity of effect produced among the hearers of the Gospel. Our Lord foretold that this would be the case in all ages of the Church. He compared “the word of his kingdom” to seed cast into different soils; and the fruits resulting from it, to the various produce of the different grounds. In unfolding the parable of the Sower, we shall be led to notice,

I. The way-side hearers—

There are two things wherein careless hearers resemble seed fallen by the way-side;

They “hear the word without understanding”—

[They attend upon the ordinances merely in a customary manner. They do not go to hear with a view to obtain benefit to their souls. Their minds are occupied about something they have seen or done, or are meditating some new plans of

business or pleasure. Thus, though they hear the word, they scarcely give it any attention, or attend merely to the style of composition and manner of delivery. No wonder then that they obtain no solid views of divine truth.]

They lose it without regret—

["Satan" is more concerned with them than they are at all aware of. Like "the fowls of the air," he hovers round them to "catch away the seed." The word is no sooner uttered, than he turns their attention from it; nor is it difficult for him, by suggesting other thoughts, to accomplish his purpose. He well knows that, if they truly "believe the word, they will be saved" by it; and that, if they hear it with attention and candour, they cannot but believe it. Hence he labours incessantly to divert their minds from it. If, after all, some scattered truths remain upon the mind, they are speedily "trodden down" by the incidental occurrences of the day.]

These, it is to be feared, are by far the most numerous class of hearers. But there are some to whom the word seems not to come in vain:

II. The stony-ground hearers—

These, though *equally hard as to their hearts*, differ widely from the former—

They "embrace the word gladly"—

[Their affections, like a thin coat of earth upon a rock, "receive the word." The novelty of it, and their hope of an interest in it, delights their mind. They are moved at the sufferings of Christ, or the promises of the Gospel, as they would be at any good news, or pathetic story. "Immediately" they begin to make a profession of religion, and seem to surpass many who have been longer instructed in the way.]

But they "renounce it again speedily"—

[They never were deeply convinced of sin, nor felt their need of Christ. They embraced the Gospel, without ever seriously counting the cost. Ere long, they find that they have to endure "persecution for the word's sake:" this, like "the sun" in its brightness, penetrates through the surface of their affections, and burns up the seed, which was "never rooted" in their understanding and will; then they renounce their profession as speedily as they had taken it up, and either "secretly decline" from the society to which they were attached, or "openly proclaim the disgust," with which their late pretensions have inspired them.]

Nor are these the only persons who disappoint the hopes of the sower:

III. The thorny-ground hearers—

These are a class who more nearly resemble that of true Christians; but though their profession is more specious, their end is not more happy.

They maintain a religious character to the end—

[They do not disregard the word like the way-side hearers, or cast away their profession like those of the stony ground. They maintain, for the most part, an uniform regard to the Gospel; they associate with the people of God in preference to all others; they worship God in their closet and family, as well as in the public assembly; nor do they live in any practices which are grossly inconsistent with their character.]

But the fruit which they produce is not of a “perfect” kind—

[They were never thoroughly purged from “the thorns” which were natural to the soil. “The cares or pleasures of this world” still continue to corrode their hearts. There is always “something which they desire” more than real holiness. Thus the nutriment of the soil is withdrawn by noxious roots, and the influences of the air and sun “obstructed” by surrounding branches. Hence their fruit is never properly matured and ripened. Their confessions want that tenderness of spirit that argues them sincere; their prayers, that holy importunity, which alone ensures success; their praises, that love and fervour, which alone can make them acceptable. The whole obedience of their lives is destitute of that divine energy, which results from the operation of God’s Spirit.]

The seed however that is sown is not wholly unproductive—

IV. The good-ground hearers—

There is a most essential difference between these and the preceding characters—

They receive the word with humility—

[All the other characters have the soil itself depraved; but these receive the word into “honest and good hearts.” Not that their hearts are altogether free from human depravity; but they have an upright intention and desire to profit. They neither cavil at the word, nor endeavour to pervert its meaning. They wish to be instructed by it, and to fulfil whatever it requires. In hearing it, they apply it as the word of God addressed to their souls, and they (which is not said respecting any of the others) “understand it.” They see its import, taste its sweetness, and embrace it as suited to their case.]

They improve it with diligence—

[They are careful to “bring forth the fruits” of righteousness. “Not” that all of them accomplish their wishes “in an equal degree.” Splendid talents, extensive influence, or favourable occasions may enable some to distinguish themselves from others. On the other hand, poverty and seclusion may cause the light of others to be more obscured. Degrees of grace too, like a kindlier climate and a richer soil, make an abundant difference in degrees of fruitfulness. Some, like St. Paul, have no delight but in adoring and serving God: they burn with love, not towards their friends only, but their most cruel enemies; and all their tempers, wishes, thoughts, are cast into the mould of the Gospel. Others, though less eminent, are filled with zeal in their Master’s cause: if they be not borne as on seraphs’ wings, they run eagerly as in a race; and, though labouring under some infirmities, they bear much of their Saviour’s image. Nor are they who are least fruitful satisfied with their attainment: they uniformly conflict with sin, and long to be holy as God is holy.]

ADDRESS—

[Let us “hear this parable,” not to judge others, but ourselves. Let us examine to which of the foregoing classes we belong: What has been the disposition with which we have heard the word? What the benefits we have received from the preached Gospel? Have we laboured to treasure up the truth of God in our hearts? Has it overpowered the corrupt desires which would obstruct its growth? And are we rising daily beyond the form, to the life and power of godliness? Surely neither Christ nor any faithful “sower of the word” will account his toil repaid if he see not this fruit of his labours. Let us not then be satisfied with being “almost,” and not “altogether,” Christians. If the word produce not its full effect, it will convey no benefit at all. If it destroy not the noxious weeds, the weeds will certainly destroy it. If it be not “a savour of life unto life, it will be of death unto death.” Whatever profession men may make, *none but the good-ground hearers will be saved at last*. Let us now then guard against the devices of our great enemy. Let us watch that he take not the seed out of our hearts. Let us harrow it in, as it were, by meditation and prayer: and, however fruitful we have been, let us labour to abound more and more^a.]

^a The observations made in this Discourse being almost wholly confined to the parable itself, it may suffice to refer to that. See Matt. xiii. 3—8, 18—23. Mark iv. 3—8; 14—20. Luke viii. 4—15. The words marked with inverted commas allude particularly to the parable.

MCCCLXII.

LEAVEN HID IN MEAL.

Matt. xiii. 33. *Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.*

AS our Lord was not weary of multiplying his parables, so neither should we be of considering them. There is indeed an inexhaustible variety in them; and in those, which most resemble each other, there will be found a rich and instructive diversity. Scarcely any two are more alike than this and the one which precedes it. But *that* declares the extensive spread of the Gospel from small beginnings, and *this* its assimilating and transforming efficacy. In tracing the parallel between the Gospel kingdom and leaven hid in the meal, we shall find that they are,

I. Assimilating in their nature—

[Leaven changes not the substance of the meal in which it is hid, but materially alters its qualities: it so impregnates the meal as to transform it, as it were, into its own likeness. Thus does the Gospel affect those who receive it into their hearts: it makes us partakers of a Divine nature^a. It does not indeed *essentially change* either the faculties of the soul, or the members of the body; but it communicates to them a new life and power, a new direction and tendency. The Gospel is compared to a mould, into which souls, when melted by Divine grace, are cast^b, and from which they derive a new and heavenly form. Hence, when converted by it, we are said to be renewed after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness^c; and the more this leaven works within us, the more are we changed into Christ's image, from glory to glory^d.

The same effect does the Gospel produce also in the world at large: wherever it prevails, it invariably brings men to the same mind, temper, and disposition. All are rendered vile in their own eyes; all are made willing to receive mercy through Christ alone; and all pant after holiness, as the perfection of their nature and the summit of their bliss. There is indeed a great diversity of parties and opinions respecting things of

^a 2 Pet. i. 4.

^b Rom. vi. 17. This seems to be the proper meaning of εἰς ὃν παρεδόθητε τύπον ἡλικίας, though it is not so expressed in our translation.

^c Eph. iv. 23, 24.

^d 2 Cor. iii. 18.

smaller moment; but in the fundamental points all are agreed, and, when upon their knees before God, have the most perfect resemblance to each other. Being joined to the Lord they are one spirit with him, and with each other^e. The same spirit pervades both the Head and all the members. Hence all true Christians of every place and every age are “one bread,” being impregnated with the same heavenly leaven, and formed into one mass for the service of their common Lord and Master^f.]

The resemblance further appears, in that both of them are,

II. Mysterious in their operation—

[How, in the leavening of meal, the one substance acts upon the other so as to produce a fermentation, is a mystery, which the wisest philosophers are not able to explain. The secret energy of the leaven is discoverable in its effects; but the precise mode of its operation cannot be ascertained. The same difficulty occurs in explaining the operation of the Gospel on the hearts of men: its truths have an energy that is not found in any thing else. The word is quick, and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword, penetrating the very inmost recesses of the soul^g. But *how* this leaven, as soon as it is put into the heart, begins to work, *how* it operates with such invincible power, and *how* it uniformly changes, as well the most guilty and obdurate hearts, as those which seem more likely to yield to its impressions—*this* is indeed a mystery. The effects produced by it are evident and undeniable; but how it produces those effects so as to transform the vilest sinner into the very image of God, is known to God alone. On account of this mysterious property, our Lord compared the Gospel to the wind, which, though manifest enough in its effects, is in many respects inexplicable^h.

If the Gospel be so mysterious in its operation upon individuals, it must of necessity be so too in its operations upon the world at large. We pretend not to say *how* the simple doctrine of the cross should be made to triumph over all the prejudices and passions of mankind; but, from what we have already seen, we cannot doubt of its final success.]

Lastly, they are both,

III. Universal in their influence—

[Leaven, when it has begun to work, never ceases till it has leavened all the meal. Thus does the Gospel also work in the hearts of men. It changes, not their outward conduct only, but the inward dispositions of the heart. Both body and soul

^e 1 Cor. vi. 17.

^g Heb. iv. 12.

^f 1 Cor. x. 17.

^h John iii. 8.

are thoroughly renewed by it; not indeed perfectly as to the degree, but universally in all their members and all their faculties. Their members are made instruments of righteousnessⁱ, and their faculties are filled with light and holiness. The man is made altogether “a new creature; old things are passed away, and all things are become new^k.”

Thus will the world also be regenerated by the grace of the Gospel. “Those who are now sitting in darkness and the shadow of death shall behold its light,” and those who are abandoned to the most brutish lusts and ignorance, shall be transformed into the very image of their God. This leaven has long been put into the great mass of mankind: it has already raised a ferment throughout a great part of the world, and in due season shall “leaven the whole lump.” Though its progress be but slow at present, it shall work, till it has pervaded every soul, and “brought all nations to the obedience of faith.”]

The parable, thus explained, is of signal use,

1. To rectify our judgment—

[Some think that they have the grace of God, while yet they have never experienced any change in their souls; while others, on account of the commotion raised there, are ready to despond, as though they were utterly abandoned by God. But both of these may see their error, if they will duly consider this parable. *To the former* we could say, can leaven be put into the meal and no fermentation be produced? much less can the grace of God be in the heart and cause no commotion there. Be assured it will work as it did on the day of Pentecost, and cause you to cry out with earnestness, “What shall I do to be saved?” Yea more, if it do not continue to operate, if it do not gradually pervade all your powers, and progressively change them into your Saviour’s image, you may be sure that the leaven of Divine grace has never yet been put into your hearts. *To the latter* we would say, be not discouraged at the commotion in your soul; but be thankful for it. It is infinitely better to know our guilt and danger than to be lulled asleep in a fatal security. Your disquietude affords reason to hope that God has caused the heavenly leaven to blend itself with your souls. Give it time then to work. If it be of God, it shall stand; and the effects produced shall discover the true cause from whence they sprang. O beg of God that it may work effectually, and that it may never cease till it has made you “perfect and complete in all his will.”]

2. To reform our hearts—

[The true and uniform tendency of the Gospel has been

ⁱ Rom. vi. 13.

^k 2 Cor. v. 17.

abundantly manifest. It is incumbent therefore on every one to ask himself, What reason have I to think that this "kingdom of God is within me¹?" What change has it wrought, what assimilating and transforming efficacy has it discovered? There is, it is true, a leaven in the heart of natural men; but it is either a "leaven of malice and wickedness^m," or a "leaven of hypocrisyⁿ:" whichever of these it be, it must be "purged out, that they may become a new lump^o." Their souls must be impregnated with a very different leaven, even that of grace and truth. Let us then "hide the word of God within us," that by its influence we may be renewed^p. Let our prayer be, Lord, "sanctify me through thy truth^q." And "may the very God of peace sanctify us wholly, that thus our whole body, soul and spirit, may be preserved blameless unto his heavenly kingdom^r!"]

¹ Luke xvii. 21.^m 1 Cor. v. 8.ⁿ Luke xii. 1.^o 1 Cor. v. 7.^p Ps. cxix. 11.^q John xvii. 17.^r 1 Thess. v. 23.

MCCCLXIII.

THE TARES.

Matt. xiii. 36. *His disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.*

THERE is much in the Holy Scriptures which unenlightened reason cannot comprehend. Hence the proud and self-sufficient continue ignorant of many truths. But they who seek Divine teaching have more enlarged views. God can "reveal to babes what he hides from the wise and prudent." Nor will he leave any in darkness who pray for his Spirit. The Apostles set us an example worthy of our imitation. Our Lord delivered many parables which none clearly understood. But while the Scribes and Pharisees stumbled at them, the more teachable Apostles entreated their Lord to explain their import. Both the parable of the tares and the explanation of it are contained in this chapter^a.

To elucidate it more fully, we observe, that the members of Christ's visible Church resemble wheat and tares growing together;

^a ver. 24—30. and 37—43.

I. In their present growth—

The Church, like a field in which different grains are sown, contains persons of very different characters—

[Jesus sows much “good seed” in this wretched world: whatever use he makes of his ministers, the glory is his alone. But “Satan” is indefatigable in “sowing bad seed” in the Church: he takes advantage of the sloth and carelessness of Christ’s servants^b, and raises up hypocrites wherever Christ raises his elect.]

These grow together to the grief of all who are truly upright—

[Faithful ministers carry their complaints to their Lord and Master; and from zeal for his honour would pluck up the tares^c: but God will not suffer them to make this arduous attempt. No man whatever is capable of distinguishing all characters. Many, who have specious appearances, would be left by us as wheat; while many, who are inwardly sincere, would be plucked up as tares. From regard to these God commands us to forbear^d. He suffers us indeed, and commands us, to exclude the notoriously profligate; but he reserves to himself the office of judging the hearts of men. Till the harvest day therefore we must expect this mixture. Nor will it, in the issue, prove injurious to the saints. They are now stirred up the more to watchfulness and prayer; and hypocrites themselves have the offers of grace and mercy continued to them.]

The reproach occasioned by this will all be wiped away,

II. In their future separation—

The day of judgment is as the harvest—

[The angels are represented by our Lord as *his* angels; and these he will use as his reapers^e. He will endue them with wisdom to discern the characters of all, and will guide them infallibly in the execution of his will.]

Then the different characters shall be separated from each other—

[The “tares” are they who “offend,” that is, by a false profession cause others to stumble at the ways of God^f; and they, who, making no profession, “commit iniquity” without restraint. All these shall be gathered first and “bound up in bundles^g.” Thus will they, who have been partners in sin,

^b ver. 25.

^c ver. 27.

^d ver. 29. and Matt. xviii. 14.

^e ver. 39.

^f ver. 41.

^g ver. 30.

be made partners in misery. Alas! what groups of profane persons, formalists, and hypocrites, will then be bound together! May "our souls never be gathered with these;" but be "bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord our God!" The "wheat" are "the righteous," who are renewed in the spirit of their minds: they too shall be gathered in order to receive their portion.]

What a wonderful, but awful separation will there then be!

[Among the tares, not so much as one grain of wheat will be found: nor among the righteous will there be left one ungodly person. The ungodly husband shall be torn from the arms of his compassionate wife, and the profane child from the bosom of his religious parent. God will shew no respect to one rather than another. The wicked, stript of their veils, will be consigned over to punishment; and the righteous, freed from mutual jealousies, shall unite in perfect harmony.]

The awfulness of this separation will be more fully seen,

III. In their eternal destiny—

The wicked will "first" receive the doom for which they are reserved—

[They will be cast, like worthless tares, into the furnaceⁱ; nor, however God pities them now, will he shew them any mercy then. Not that the fire shall consume them utterly as it would tares: to prevent this mistake, the metaphor is intentionally changed. They will "wail" for the mercies they have despised and the opportunities they have lost: they will "gnash their teeth" with anguish and vexation of spirit—against themselves (like a ruined gamester) for their folly—against each other, for having enticed each other to sin—against God, with impotent malice, for so punishing their transgressions^k. And this doom will be inflicted "first" in the very sight of the godly^l. Thus will the godly see how great mercy they have received.]

The righteous will then receive the kingdom prepared for them—

[They, as wheat, shall be treasured up in the granary of heaven. Not that they shall continue there in a state of inactivity. To correct this idea the metaphor here is also changed. God himself will not be ashamed to be called "their Father." They shall shine forth in his kingdom like the sun. Their

^h Ps. xxvi. 9. 1 Sam. xxv. 29.

^k Rev. xvi. 9, 11.

ⁱ ver. 42.

^l ver. 30.

splendour shall burst forth as from behind a cloud^m. They delighted to enjoy God; they shall now see him face to face. They longed to glorify God; they shall now have every faculty employed in his service for evermore.]

The most suitable IMPROVEMENT is suggested by our Lord himselfⁿ—

1. Let the profane “hear”—

[You can be at no loss to determine whether ye be tares or wheat: your conduct will decide that point beyond a doubt^o. And are you willing to be daily ripening for the furnace? Know that, as ye are at death, ye will continue to all eternity. But ye may now be changed from tares to wheat. Though this change cannot take place in nature, it can in the kingdom of grace. Entreat the Lord then that ye may become new creatures^p. All that are now in the granary of heaven were once as ye are^q; and ye, if ye will seek the Lord, shall become as they are.]

2. Let self-deceivers hear—

[It is in vain to think yourselves the Lord's people when ye are not. Inquire whether ye have been truly born again^r? See whether ye differ from the world, and from your former selves, as much as wheat differs from tares. Be not satisfied with “a form of godliness,” and “a name to live.” The day of final separation is near at hand: let every day therefore be spent in earnest preparation for it.]

3. Let the upright also hear—

[The unavoidable mixture in the Church is doubtless a burthen to you; and if you be not careful, it may also become a snare: but, without judging others, strive to approve yourselves to God^s. Speedily will the period of your happiness arrive. Look forward then to death, with composure and gratitude; regard it as the waggons sent to convey you home; and, till it arrive, be praying for the influences of the sun and rain. So shall you be gathered in due season as a shock that is ripe, and be transported with joy to your eternal rest.]

^m Ἐκλάμψουσιν.

ⁿ ver. 43.

^o 1 John iii. 7, 8.

^p 2 Cor. v. 17.

^q Eph. ii. 3. and Gal. iv. 12. in the Greek.

^r John iii. 3.

^s 1 Cor. iv. 5.

MCCCLXIV.

THE HIDDEN TREASURE.

Matt. xiii. 44. *The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which, when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.*

THE Gospel, as viewed in various lights, admits of various representations. It is generally set forth as small in its beginnings, but increasing in importance. But we must not therefore suppose it to be of small value. Our Lord sufficiently guards against this mistake by the parable before us. He shews us, that the Gospel, even while hid from our view, is exceeding precious—

It will be proper to shew,

I. Why the kingdom of heaven is likened to a “treasure hid”—

“The kingdom of heaven” is an expression peculiar to the New Testament—

[By it we are not always to understand heaven itself; it is frequently used to signify Christ’s spiritual kingdom; and it is so called, because it is the re-establishment of God’s empire over the hearts of men, and because what is thus begun in grace will be consummated in glory.]

This may well be considered as “a treasure”—

[There is no other thing so deserving of this name. Every one that is possessed of it may say with truth, “All things are mine^a.” He is “blessed—with all spiritual blessings—in heavenly things—in Christ^b.” Every earthly pleasure is contemptible in comparison of it.]

But it is compared to a treasure “hid in a field”—

[The mysteries of the Gospel were from eternity hid in the bosom of the Father^c. Neither men nor angels could possibly have devised them. Who could have thought of bringing man back to God through the death of God’s only Son? And of reducing him to a willing subjection by the operation of God’s Spirit? A finite mind could never have conceived such an idea: but these mysteries, though revealed, are still hid from the natural man^d. They still appear foolishness, and are a stumbling-block to many^e. Paul, though so learned and religious, could not receive them in his unconverted state^f; nor would he ever have embraced them, if God had not opened his eyes^g. The Apostles, though instructed by our Lord himself all the time of his ministry, needed, after all, a divine illumination^h: nor is a spirit of revelation less necessary for us. To this very hour there is as much ground as ever for that devout

^a 1 Cor. iii. 21.

^b Eph. i. 3.

^c Eph. iii. 9.

^d 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^e 1 Cor. i. 23.

^f Acts xxii. 3, 4.

^g Acts ix. 17, 18.

^h Luke xxiv. 45.

acknowledgmentⁱ— The “field” indeed, wherein the treasure is hid, is open and accessible to all^k; but we shall perish for lack of it, unless God do for us as he did for Hagar^l. We must all adopt the prayer of David^m—]

Its intrinsic worth, joined with the difficulty of finding it, must render the acquisition delightful.

II. The emotions which a discovery of it will produce—

The illustration given by our Lord is peculiarly apt. A man who should find a treasure, would have a conflict in his mind—

[He would congratulate himself on his good fortune, and *rejoice* in his prospect of possessing so much wealth; but he would feel some dread of detection. He would *fear* lest another should see it, before he had an opportunity of securing it for himself. He would cover it up carefully, if he could not then carry it away; and if by purchasing the field he could gain the treasure, he would gladly pay down the price. In doing this he would use all the expedition and caution that he could; *nor would he hesitate to sell all that he had*, in order to complete the purchase.]

Thus is a man affected who finds the Gospel salvation—

[He is filled with *joy* at the glad tidings that he hearsⁿ; he indulges a hope that he may be interested in them; he anticipates the happiness of having his sins forgiven, and of being made an heir of the heavenly inheritance. Still, however, he is not without many misgiving fears. He knows that Satan is watching to steal away the treasure^o; nor can he tell but that that serpent may beguile him^p. He sees too that the world may deprive him of his hope^q. Yea, he perceives in his own heart a proneness to despise the proffered mercy^r. Thus is he agitated between hope and fear. This effect was predicted by the prophets of old^s, and it was, on one occasion at least, experienced by the Apostles^t: but, in the midst of all, *he is determined, if possible, to possess the treasure*. He undervalues every thing that can stand in competition with it; he well knows that, whatever he pay for it, he can be no loser; he approves in his heart the conduct of St. Paul^u— and is resolved to follow the advice of Solomon^x—]

ⁱ Matt. xi. 25, 26.

^k John v. 39.

^l Gen. xxi. 16, 19.

^m Ps. cxix. 18.

ⁿ Matt. xiii. 20.

^o Luke viii. 12.

^p 2 Cor. xi. 3.

^q Mark iv. 19.

^r Matt. xxii. 5.

^s Isai. lx. 5. Jer. xxxiii. 9.

^t Matt. xxviii. 8.

^u Gal. i. 16.

^x Prov. xxiii. 23.

APPLICATION—

[The field, which contains this treasure, is nigh at hand. The owner invites all to go and seek the treasure: he promises that all who seek in earnest shall find it^y; yea, moreover, that all who find, shall retain it^z. Let *those then who have never found it*, begin to seek. But let them adopt that prayer of the Apostle^a— The Holy Spirit alone can give success to their endeavours^b. And let them bear in mind the misery of those who fail^c. *If any have found it*, let them hold fast the prize^d; let them guard against every thing that may rob them of it; let them remember, it is not a small treasure, but an inexhaustible mine. Let them never regret any sacrifice they may make for it, but look forward to the complete enjoyment of it in heaven.]

^y Matt. vii. 7, 8.

^z Prov. viii. 35.

^a Eph. i. 17, 18.

^b John xvi. 13, 14.

^c 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

^d Rev. ii. 25. and iii. 3, 11.

MCCCLXV.

THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE.

Matt. xiii. 45, 46. *The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant-man seeking goodly pearls: who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.*

MEN are not easily wearied with renewed prospects of gain. Advantageous bargains may be offered with the greatest frequency without fear of creating disgust. Our Lord well knew that a love of earthly things was deeply rooted in our hearts, and availed himself of that knowledge the more forcibly to impress our minds with better things. He repeatedly commended his Gospel to us under the figure of a great temporal acquisition. In its general scope this parable agrees with that which precedes it. But it suggests many thoughts that are new and important.

To elucidate it we may consider,

I. In what respects the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a pearl—

The comparison is not properly between the kingdom and a merchant-man, but the kingdom and a pearl. The kingdom of heaven is the kingdom of

grace established in the world; and it may be compared to a pearl as ENRICHING. Some pearls are of very great value, and would be an ample fortune to a person who had nothing else. The Gospel kingdom also is of inestimable value to us,

In this world—

[It unfolds to our view the deepest mysteries, and gives a just *comprehension* of all spiritual things. It is said to contain “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge^a; it must therefore greatly enrich its possessor^b. The Gospel moreover imparts *grace* to the soul; nor can this grace be ever appreciated too highly. Our Lord tells us that it will make us truly rich^c. Through the Gospel also we obtain *peace* in our consciences. Who can declare the value of this to a heavy-laden soul? It surpasses all estimation, as well as all understanding^d.]

In the next world—

[The Gospel does not enrich us merely like other estates. We can hold earthly things no longer than this present life; but the benefits of the Gospel continue with us for ever. We have a more ample possession of them in the next world. Then we shall have a glorious, and incorruptible inheritance, of which earthly crowns and kingdoms convey a very faint idea. What is spoken of the Christian’s present portion may still more properly be spoken of that which he will hereafter enjoy^e. Well therefore might St. Paul represent the Gospel in such exalted terms^f—]

The Gospel kingdom may also be compared to a pearl as ADORNING—

[Pearls are considered as ornamental to the body; but infinitely more does the Gospel adorn the soul.]

It changes the life—

[Even the most abandoned of men have yielded to its power, and that figurative representation has been realized by them^g—]

It purifies the heart—

[The most inveterate corruptions have been mortified by it^h, and the most heavenly dispositions implanted in their steadⁱ.]

It transforms into the Divine image—

^a Col. ii. 3.

^b Prov. iii. 13—15.

^c Rev. iii. 18.

^d Phil. iv. 7.

^e 1 Cor. ii. 9.

^f Eph. iii. 8.

^g Isai. xi. 6—8.

^h 1 Cor. vi. 11, 12.

ⁱ 1 John iii. 3.

[It finds men altogether “alienated from the life of God,” and bearing the character of Satan’s children^k: but it renews them in all their faculties, and restores them to the very image of their God^l. This effect is ascribed to it by St. Paul himself^m—How just then is that expression of the Psalmistⁿ—! And with what propriety may the Christian exult with the prophet^o—!]

With such views of the Gospel we can be at no loss to determine,

II. How it will be regarded by those who know its value—

It is not possible for them to regard it with indifference:

1. They will seek it with diligence—

[Merchants spare no pains in the pursuit of gain; much less will they who know the value of the Gospel. They will study that book wherein it is contained. They will seek instruction from those who are best qualified to explain its mysteries. They will cry to God for the teaching of his Spirit. Nor will they be satisfied with obtaining a superficial knowledge of the truth. They will follow the direction of Solomon^p—and account its blessings a rich compensation for their trouble.]

2. They will part with all for it:

Their carnal enjoyments—

[It calls them to sacrifice their dearest interests, and to give up their nearest relatives for Christ’s sake^q. Nor will they exclaim against this as “an hard saying.” They will not act like the Rich Youth who forsook Christ^r. They will rather part with any thing, however precious, or however necessary^s.]

Their self-righteous hopes—

[There is nothing which men are more averse to renounce than their own righteousness: but a discovery of the Gospel will humble them. It will constrain them to use the language of the prophet^t—Every Christian will resemble Paul in this^u.]

Their very life itself—

[The love of life is inherent in us all: but the Gospel teaches us to overcome it. It requires us even to hate our lives in comparison of Christ^x. A view of it will enable us to do this, and will cause us to say like the holy Apostle^y—]

^k John viii. 44.

ⁿ Ps. cxlix. 4.

^q Matt. x. 37.

^t Isai. lxiv. 6.

^y Acts xx. 24.

^l Eph. iv. 24.

^o Isai. lxi. 10.

^r Mark x. 22.

^u Phil. iii. 7—9.

^m 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^p Prov. ii. 4.

^s Matt. v. 29, 30.

^x Luke xiv. 26.

QUESTIONS—

1. What is the daily object of our pursuit ?

[Are we seeking knowledge, wealth, pleasure, honour, &c. or the establishment of this kingdom in our hearts? Let us fear lest we never should obtain this invaluable pearl; and let us follow the direction of our blessed Lord^z —]

2. What have we parted with for the Gospel's sake ?

[We are not persecuted now as in former ages; but every man is called to make some sacrifices. What then have we forfeited for the sake of Christ? *If we were suffered to retain only one thing, what should that one thing be?* Remember, God requires a single eye, and an undivided heart^a.]

3. If you have purchased this pearl, what are you doing with it ?

[It is not to be locked up, as it were, in a cabinet. You must indeed keep it carefully as a rich treasure; but you must also wear it about you as an ornament. It should have the effect on you, that converse with God produced on Moses^b. In this way you will commend it to the world, and will most acceptably comply with our Lord's direction^c —]

^z Matt. vi. 33.^a Luke xi. 34, 35.^b Exod. xxxiv. 35.^c Matt. v. 16.

MCCCLXVI.

THE NET.

Matt. xiii. 47—50. *The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.*

MEN are forcibly impressed by similes taken from things with which they are well acquainted. Hence the various parables are suited to those classes of the community, who are conversant in the occupations to which they relate. The greater part of them refer to the different employments of husbandry, because our Lord sojourned chiefly among persons engaged in agricultural pursuits. But he was also frequently

called to instruct fishermen; to whose more immediate use he adapted the parable before us.

In order to elucidate the text we observe that,

I. A great variety of persons are gathered by the Gospel into the visible Church—

The Gospel is preached promiscuously to all—

[When a net is cast into the sea, the fisherman knows not what success he shall have: he may toil all the night and catch nothing; or may inclose a number that can with difficulty be drawn to shore^a. However skilful he may be in his trade, he is dependent wholly on the good providence of God.

Thus the Gospel is published to all without any respect of persons. Nor can the preachers of it command success: if Paul or Apollos labour, it is God alone that can render their endeavours effectual to the salvation of men^b.]

There are however many, for the most part, brought by means of it to a profession of religion—

[Where nothing but morality is preached, the people all remain stupid and unconcerned about their souls: but where CHRIST is truly exalted, *some* will feel the constraining influence of the word^c, and be drawn out of the vain world to an attendance on the duties of religion. But of these there will be various kinds: some will go no further than the mere form of godliness^d; others will seem to enjoy somewhat of its life and power, while in reality they have no stability in the ways of God^e, or, though they persevere in their profession of religion, they do not walk worthy of their high calling^f — — — There will be others, however, who are truly upright before God, and who “adorn the Gospel of God our Saviour in all things.”

All these persons will be collected into a visible Church; all will profess an attachment to the Gospel: and all will feel some kind of confidence respecting their final acceptance before God.]

But,

II. Of those that are so gathered, there will be an awful separation in the day of judgment—

Fishermen will not encumber themselves with fishes that are worthless; nor will God receive to himself all that are gathered by the Gospel.

There will be a separation made in the day of judgment—

^a Luke v. 5, 6.

^b 1 Cor. iii. 7.

^c Jer. xxiii. 22.

^d 2 Tim. iii. 5.

^e ver. 20, 21.

^f ver. 22.

[God makes use of men to collect persons into the visible Church; but he will employ "angels" as his agents to "separate the bad from the good." Nor will they, when acting under the direction of the Most High, be liable to the smallest error. They will see with one glance of their eye, who have been justified in Christ Jesus, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. No fisherman can distinguish between the most different sorts of fish more clearly than the angels will, between the weakest of the saints, and the most refined of hypocrites. Not one that is truly good, shall be cast away; nor one that is really bad, be preserved.]

That separation will be inexpressibly awful—

[Here the parable was inadequate to convey the truth; and therefore our Lord added a further explanation of it. Fishes that are cast away suffer no otherwise than in meeting death a little sooner than those that are reserved in vessels. But it is not thus with souls that are cast away; for they shall be "cast into a furnace of fire, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth for ever" — — — O fearful end! how inconceivably different from that of those who shall be treasured up in vessels as "meet for their Master's use!" — — —]

INFER,

1. How diligently should we attend the ordinances of the Gospel!

[Ministers are made "fishers of men;" and their one employment is to "catch men^g." (This, my brethren, is the office which I am executing for God at this very moment: I am labouring to catch your souls for God.) Now it is in the ordinances that they go forth to cast their net: and if persons do not attend the ordinances, there is no probability of their ever being drawn to God^h. Let not any trifling matters then be suffered to detain us from the house of God; for we cannot tell the precise time at which God has designed to enclose us in his net. And what a loss should we sustain, if through absence we deprived ourselves of that benefit! Let us then not only come to the house of God, but beg him to instruct his servants how to cast the net in the most advantageous mannerⁱ, for our benefit, and for his glory.]

2. How careful should we be not to rest in an unsound profession of religion!

[It is not every one that is gathered by the Gospel, that shall enjoy its saving benefits. Many there are who approve of the truth, and take pleasure in hearing it proclaimed^k, who

^g Matt. iv. 19. Luke v. 10.

^h Rom. x. 17.

ⁱ John xxi. 6.

^k Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32.

yet shall never enter into the kingdom of heaven. Let all then judge themselves by the marks exhibited in the Holy Scriptures. Let them inquire whether, if the separation were at this instant to be made, they should be found amongst the good or the bad, among those that are truly alive to God, or those who, though they "have a name to live, are really dead" before God¹. Let it be remembered that the net is now spread, and that we are now enclosed in it; and, though we do not immediately perceive it, the net is at this moment drawing to shore. My dear brethren, I tremble to think how many of us will ere long be irrecoverably cast into a furnace of fire, and with what bitter "wailings," and self-condemning "gnashing of their teeth," they will look back upon the warnings they have despised, and the opportunities they have lost. Speedily, speedily will the scrutiny be made; and then the final separation. May God of his infinite mercy prepare us all for that awful day, by renewing our natures, and accepting us in his beloved Son; that so we may be numbered with the good, and be approved of our God for ever and ever!]

¹ Rev. iii. 1.

MCCCLXVII.

THE HOUSEHOLDER.

Matt. xiii. 52. *Every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.*

IT is of importance to all, but especially to those who are to teach others, that they understand clearly the mysteries of the Gospel. An ignorant minister, like an empty cloud or a leaky vessel, disappoints those who expect consolation and refreshment from him. But a well-instructed Scribe or minister resembles a housekeeper or steward, who, having made good provision for the family, feeds them to the full. With this comparison our Lord gave his attentive and intelligent disciples, a view of the office which would in due season be committed to them. The resemblance of every such minister to a householder may be traced in that,

I. He is provided with all things necessary for the family over whom he is placed—

A steward, or householder, has the charge of providing for the family. He considers not only what is wanting at the present moment, but what will be wanted on future occasions; and he preserves for future use the productions of foreign climes, or of successive seasons. Thus every pious minister labours to provide for the Church of God.

1. He makes himself acquainted with the wants of all his people—

[The Church, over which he is made an overseer, is God's family. To supply their returning wants is his peculiar duty. Hence he is led to reflect upon their various states. He contemplates the difficulties and dangers to which they are exposed, the trials and temptations which they have to sustain, and the consolations and supports which they severally need; and thus he endeavours to learn what will be most suitable to their respective cases.]

2. He lays up in store what he may afterwards bring forth for their use—

[The Scriptures are the grand repository of sacred knowledge. These therefore he searches with all diligence, and "*treasures*" up with care. But while he furnishes his mind with "*old things*," he is observant also of "*new*." What he daily sees, or hears, or feels, is added carefully to his stock. Thus his knowledge becomes enlarged by observation, and matured by experience; and his fund of information is suited to the necessities of all to whom he ministers.]

In prosecuting his work,

II. He dispenses seasonably to each according to their respective wants—

A householder, or steward, furnishes out of his store what is wanted for daily use, and apports to all the branches of the family what is suited to their respective stations. Thus a well-instructed minister demeans himself in the Church of Christ:

1. He gives to all an agreeable variety—

[Though Christ and his salvation be the great topic of his discourses, he descends, on proper occasions, to many other subjects connected with it. He opens the mysteries of the "*Old*" Testament, and illustrates them by the "*New*." He declares what God has asserted in his word, and confirms it by appeals to acknowledged facts, and to the experience of all around him. And though "it is not grievous to him to repeat"

the great truths of the Gospel, he endeavours continually to diversify them in his statements, and to give them an air of novelty in his illustration of them.]

2. He administers to each his proper portion—

[To those whose growth in grace enables them to digest strong meat, he explains the deep mysteries of religion, and the more hidden parts of Christian experience. To those who can only feed on milk, he contents himself with proposing simply the great doctrines of our fall in Adam, and our recovery by Christ, together with the life of faith on Christ Jesus. He considers the peculiar experiences incident to different states, and discriminates between that which is correct, and that which is delusive, in them all. He gives the cup of consolation to the drooping penitent, or doubting believer, but holds forth the waters of jealousy to those who are of suspicious character^a. Thus, neither disabled by ignorance nor kept back by sloth, neither bribed by affection nor deterred by fear, he “gives to each his portion of bread in due season.”]

INFER—

1. The vast importance of the ministerial office—

[If we had only to provide for the body, it were but a small matter; but the souls of thousands depend on those who minister in holy things. Well may we say, “Who is sufficient for these things^b?” May all who have undertaken the office of the ministry, have grace to qualify themselves for it with unremitting diligence, and to execute it with undeviating fidelity!]

2. The benefit arising from it to the Church—

[How ill supplied would every member of a family be, if each were left to provide for himself; and how injurious would such a distraction be to their respective callings! Much more would these inconveniences be felt, if there were no stated ministry. People are sadly ignorant of the Gospel, notwithstanding all their advantages: but, without a stated ministry, they would soon degenerate into very heathens. Let all then be thankful that the Master of the family has appointed stewards to make suitable provision for them. Let them pray that their ministers may be taught of God to teach others^c; and let them improve with diligence the ordinances dispensed among them.]

^a Numb. v. 11—31.

^b 2 Cor. ii. 16.

^c This, together with that which follows, may be amplified in a way of *direct address*.

MCCCLXVIII.

CHRIST WALKING ON THE SEA.

Matt. xiv. 26, 27. *When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.*

THE Christian's duties are often difficult and self-denying. Nevertheless he must do the will of God, and leave events to his all-wise disposal. Jesus ordered his Disciples to go in a small vessel to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the multitudes, who had been fed by him. They, probably approving in their hearts the proposal that had been made to invest him with royal authority^a, were somewhat averse to leave him; but, being commanded to go, complied^b. In the discharge of their duty they were overtaken with a storm, which not only obstructed their progress, but endangered their lives. In this state they were greatly terrified; but they soon found that the way of duty was the way of safety.

In elucidating the miraculous interposition of Jesus on their behalf, we shall notice,

I. The power he exercised—

He came to them walking on the sea—

[Jesus, after dismissing the multitudes, retired to a mountain to pray; and thus by his own example taught us all, and especially ministers, that, however pressing our public business may be, we should redeem time, even from sleep, for the purposes of private devotion. In the meantime his disciples, driven from their course, were contending with the storm^c. But Jesus went to their relief; and, having no boat or attendants to convey him, walked to them upon the tempestuous waters.]

This he did from the purest and most benevolent motives—

[Had he been actuated by a vain ostentation, he would probably have continued walking on the sea, instead of going

^a John vi. 15.

^b Ἠνάγκασεν, ver. 22.

^c They were ordered to go over a small bay to Bethsaida; but striving against the winds which drove them out to sea towards Capernaum, they were, after many hours, only a league from shore.

up into the ship, that the people of Capernaum also might behold him^d; but his disciples were to be his witnesses to the world; and, being very slow of heart to believe, they needed more abundant testimonies for their conviction. Now the walking upon the sea was known to be an indication of Divine power^e. He therefore gave them this evidence *on purpose to prove to them his Messiahship*; and, by means of it, he wrought a conviction on their minds, which his other miracles had failed to produce^f.]

The first effect produced by his appearance to them, leads us to notice,

II. The fears he occasioned—

His disciples were extremely terrified at the sight of him—

[The day but just beginning to dawn, their view of him was very indistinct. They supposed him to be a spirit. They knew that it was an evil spirit who had raised the storm by which Job's family were destroyed^g; and they possibly might think that such a spirit had stirred up this tempest, and was now coming to overwhelm them utterly. Filled with terror, they cried aloud; accounting him an object of dread, whom, if they had known him, they would have regarded as their most seasonable, most welcome deliverer; but the trouble was necessary, in order to engage their more fixed attention to the miracle now exhibited before their eyes.]

Thus are the Lord's people frequently harassed by unnecessary fears—

[All are called to sustain some conflicts in the path of duty; and in the midst of trouble the mind is apt to faint. If our difficulties or dangers be great, we are prone to indulge despondency, and to increase by imaginary fears the calamities under which we labour. How often has *that* been a source of trouble to us, which should rather have been an occasion of joy and gratitude! How often have we forgotten, that God is pledged for our support, while we continue in the path of duty; and that there are a thousand unforeseen ways in which he can appear for us, when we think him most unmindful of our state! But, however distressing our fears may be for a moment, we shall have reason to be thankful for them, if they be the means of impressing us with a more abiding sense of Christ's love and faithfulness; yea, they are often permitted, and even excited by him, for this very end.]

^d Besides, he had just refused to be made a king. ^e Job ix. 8.

^f ver. 33. with Mark vi. 52.

^g Job i. 12, 19.

These fears however were amply compensated by,
 III. The condescension he manifested—

He instantly dispelled their fears in the kindest and most condescending manner—

[He at first appeared as though he would pass by them; but, having tried them for a moment, he revealed himself unto them, and bade them dismiss their groundless fears. He moreover went up into the vessel to them; and immediately the ship was wafted to its destined port^h.]

Thus does he at this time also allay the fears of his people—

[Are they distressed by reason of fierce opposition? he reminds them that, with Him on their side, they have none to fearⁱ. Are they overwhelmed with heavy trials? his presence with them is urged by him as an abundant ground of consolation and encouragement^k. Are they desponding under an apprehension that they are forsaken by him? he gently reproves their unbelief^l, and assures them of his unremitting care^m. Whatever be the source of their discouragement, he bids them not fearⁿ; and commands his ministers to labour more especially in comforting their afflicted minds^o. Thus, by revealing himself to them, he removes their trouble; and, by his presence with them, carries them forward towards the haven of rest.]

INFER—

1. There is no state in which Christ *can* not save us—

[Our difficulties may be greatly multiplied, and appear utterly unsurmountable; but “his hand is not shortened that it cannot save; nor is his ear heavy, that it cannot hear. He who “made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over,” and *saved* Jonah in the belly of a fish, can never be at a loss for means to deliver us. On the contrary, the greater be the obstacles to our salvation, the more will he magnify his power and grace in effecting it.]

2. There is no state in which Christ *will* not save us—

[He sees us when we little think of it; and is often nearer to us than we imagine. Our conflicts may be long; and he may suffer all our endeavours to be frustrated: but he will appear for us in some unexpected way; and his presence with us shall both alleviate our labours, and crown us with success. Only let us invite him into the vessel with us, and we shall gain in safety the desired haven.]

^h John vi. 21.

ⁱ Isai. xli. 10—15.

^k Isai. xliii. 1, 2, 5.

^l Isai. xl. 27—31. ^m Isai. xlix. 14, 15. ⁿ Luke xii. 32.

^o Isai. xxxv. 4.

MCCCLXIX.

PETER SAVED WHEN SINKING IN THE SEA.

Matt. xiv. 30, 31. *But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?*

MEN'S constitutional propensities are apt to betray them into many errors. Whatever be the natural frailties of any person, they usually form the weak part of his character even to his latest hour. The force of them is no where more strongly exhibited than in the conduct of Peter. He was of a bold, forward, confident disposition. This led him on many occasions to act with indiscretion, and often brought upon him a just reproof. In the passage before us he needlessly solicited a trial of his faith, and the experiment terminated in his shame.

The account given of it in the text, leads us to observe,

I. That we should not unnecessarily expose ourselves to temptation—

[Peter doubtless was in part actuated by faith and love: but, in soliciting permission to display the grace of which he supposed himself possessed, he erred. There was no more occasion for *him* to venture thus upon the waters, than for any other of the Apostles to do it. And, in affecting this distinction above all his brethren, he betrayed a considerable measure of pride and vain glory: and, in acceding to his request, our Lord chiefly designed to make him sensible of his own weakness. In fact, this attempt to display his faith and courage, was overruled for the discovering of his cowardice and unbelief, and of putting him to shame for his overweening conceit and forwardness. And thus will God deal with us, if, under an idea of our ability to withstand temptation, we expose ourselves needlessly to its assaults. Who does not see the folly of Dinah in going to visit the daughters of an heathen people, and of subjecting herself to the temptation by which she fell? Yet is her example followed by thousands amongst ourselves, who associate with ungodly companions, and frequent places of vain amusement, and expose themselves to temptations of various kinds, under an idea that they “can take fire in their bosoms,

and not be burned!" But their folly will sooner or later be manifest, even as Peter's was. As then our Lord cautions us against worldly-mindedness by the example of Lot's wife, so would I caution all of you, my brethren, against self-confidence by the sad example of Peter. On another occasion, Peter sinned yet far more grievously through a mistaken notion of his power to maintain his integrity. He went from mere idle curiosity to see the issue of his master's trial in the hall of Pilate, and there he denied his Lord with oaths and curses. And what may result from an unnecessary exposure of yourselves to temptation, God alone knows. But I would put you all upon your guard, and say to every one amongst you, 'Remember Peter's infirmity, with the danger consequent upon it.'

But you may further learn from this history,]

II. That, if in the way of providence we are called to trials, we need not fear them—

[When Peter had once obtained his Lord's command to come to him upon the waters, he had no occasion for fear. If the water was made so firm as to sustain his weight, what reason had he to fear the waves? Hence our Lord justly reproveth his unbelief, saying, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" In this he has shewn how weak we all are, when we come into temptation. Though we ourselves, both in body and soul, are living miracles, yet we forget the power that has hitherto upheld us, and are ready to tremble at the prospect of some overwhelming calamity, as though it were impossible for us to support it. The Hebrews had seen all God's wonders in Egypt, and yet on every fresh occasion of difficulty they yielded to desponding apprehensions. And thus we also are prone to fear, whenever any heavy trial occurs. But if we saw an armed host behind us, and an impassable ocean before our face, we should not question for a moment the power or veracity of God, but say to the one, "Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel, thou shalt become a plain;" and to the other, "God will make the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over." All that we have to ascertain is, whether we are in the path of duty: and, if in that respect we can see the pillar and the cloud leading the way, we need not fear all that either men or devils can do against us. This was the experience of David^a, and it should be ours. For it is certain,]

III. That whatever trials we may be brought into, the prayer of faith will be effectual for our deliverance—

^a Ps. xlv. 1—3.

[“Lord, save me!” cried Peter in his extremity: and the hand of Jesus, stretched out, saved him instantly from his peril. And where shall we find, in all the sacred records, one instance of any person calling upon the Lord in vain? The troubles of David were on many occasions exceeding heavy; yet did the prayer of faith procure for him deliverance from them all^b. And thus shall it prove with us, if only, with the simplicity of Peter’s affiance, we cry, “Lord, save me!” Let us suppose that we were, in a spiritual view, in the very predicament of Peter: let us suppose that, under loads of guilt and storms of corruption, we felt ourselves sinking into perdition; the Publican’s prayer, uttered from the heart, should prevail to allay the storm, and to bring us in safety to the haven of eternal rest. Only let us not limit either the power or grace of Christ, and we shall “be saved by him with an everlasting salvation.”]

ADDRESS—

1. The presumptuous—

[No man, whatever he may have attained, is at liberty to expose himself to needless temptations. The injunction given to every child of man is, “Be not high-minded, but fear:” “Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.” To young people especially would I give this salutary caution: ‘To rush into temptation without necessity, is to tempt the Lord.’ It is only whilst with all holy watchfulness we “keep ourselves,” that we can hope effectually to be preserved by God.]

2. The doubtful—

[The reproof given to Peter, “O thou of little faith; wherefore didst thou doubt?” is justly applicable to us, if, under any circumstances whatever, we yield to a desponding spirit. For, is not the Lord Jesus present with us? and is he not as able to save as ever! What if, with Jonah, we were “brought, as it were, into the very belly of hell,” could not the same power as restored him deliver us also^c? Only take the promises of God for your support, and they shall never fail you: for “they are all yea and Amen in Christ Jesus^d.]

3. The confirmed believer—

[You, if in other respects you are walking uprightly, bring much glory to your God. There is nothing that honours God so much as faith, and nothing that dishonours him so much as unbelief. Other sins pour contempt upon *the law*: but unbelief reflects upon *the Lawgiver*, as calling in question his veracity, or power, or love. Be ye then as lights in a dark world. The world look only to second causes: you must shew

^b Ps. xl. 1—3.

^c Jonah ii. 1—7.

^d 2 Cor. i. 20.

them that every thing, even to the falling of a sparrow, is under the direction of the first Great Cause, who alone is worthy to be regarded with either fear or love. At the same time let your confidence in God be humble, without ostentation before men, and without unhallowed boldness before God. Then may you expect to be preserved from all dangers; and both the Church and the world will be edified by your example.]

MCCCLXX.

FORMAL WORSHIPPERS, HYPOCRITES.

Matt. xv. 7—9. *Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*

IN the present day, there is very little of superstitious observance in the world, and still less of Pharisaic hypocrisy; except indeed in the Church of Rome, which is still unhappily a compound of them both. Yet these do exist even amongst Protestants: and the declaration, which in the first instance was delivered, not as a prophecy respecting future ages, but as a reproof to the Jews, in Isaiah's time^a, and which our blessed Lord afterwards applied as a prophecy respecting the people of his day; that declaration, I say, may well be considered as applicable to *us*, so far as our habits accord with those of the Jews in the two fore-mentioned periods. Let me, then, state to you, as it is my duty to do,

I. In whom this prophecy is fulfilled—

Granting that, in many things, we differ from the Pharisees, to whom our Lord applied these words, yet is the prophecy fulfilled at this day by,

1. Those who satisfy themselves with mere formal worship—

[The house of God is, on the whole, well attended in this land: and in many private families is the worship of God observed. But where shall we find any thing but a mere lifeless

^a Isai. xxix. 13.

form? The very habit of persons in the public assembly shews, for the most part, that their souls are not engaged, and that the decent performance of an acknowledged duty is all that the worshippers have in view. Hear the *confessions*: Do they resemble those of the poor publican? Do they indicate any thing of real brokenness of heart and deep contrition, like that of the converts on the day of Pentecost? Hear the *petitions*: How little fervour, how little importunity, how little of urgent pleading with God, do you observe! Hear the *thanksgivings*: Are these such as should proceed from souls “delivered from the powers of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son?” Are the emotions of gratitude for the salvation of the soul such as the lame man, whom Peter and John healed, evinced for the healing of his body^b? Do the worshippers in our churches appear at all as if they were in close communion with God himself, and transacting with him the business of their immortal souls? Alas! the devotions of the generality are no better than a solemn mockery, an “honouring of God with their lips, whilst their hearts are far from him.”]

2. Those who substitute the conceits of men for the commands of God—

[This obtains to a fearful extent in the Church of Rome, where pilgrimages, and penances, and burthensome rites of various kinds, are substituted for “repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.” Among Protestants, also, the same evil obtains to a very great degree. Every sect has its peculiarities, on which it lays a very undue stress, just as the Pharisees did on washing the hands before meat^c: and a violation of any one established order, or traditionary conceit, would be far more severely noticed than any departure from the commands of God. Let there be in any person a disposition only to disregard some characteristic dogma, or some peculiarity in discipline of his own particular Church, and how many cautions will he receive against such unadvised conduct! whilst, if he neglect God and his own soul during his whole life, he shall never hear so much as one word of friendly admonition. Nay, more; an occasional neglect of some established usage in society, or a deviation from the laws of fashion and politeness, will go further to sink us in the estimation of our neighbours, than an habitual violation of all the commands of God. This, then, shews us plainly, that a Pharisaic spirit still exists amongst us; and that the prophecy is fulfilled in our land, if not so extensively, yet as truly, as in the land of Judah, either in our Saviour’s day, or in the days of the Prophet Isaiah.]

^b Acts iii. 6—8.

^c ver. 2.

Such characters, then, still existing, let us inquire,

II. In what light they are viewed by Almighty God—

Our blessed Saviour calls them “hypocrites.” True, they are the last people in the world who suspect themselves of hypocrisy. On the contrary, they account religious persons hypocrites; and conceive themselves to be the only persons whose integrity is clear. But, however high they stand in their own esteem, they are hypocrites in the estimation of the heart-searching God. They are hypocrites,

1. In their professions—

[They profess real sanctity; but they possess it not: they have not any one of those qualities of which real sanctity consists. They “have a form of godliness, but are altogether destitute of its power.” If they say, ‘We make no profession of religion,’ I ask, Do you not call yourselves Christians? Do you not demand Christian baptism for your children? And do you not expect Christian burial when you die? Then you *do profess* yourselves followers of Christ: and while you shew so little love to Christ, and so little resemblance to him, you are downright hypocrites. And if a man were as disloyal to an earthly king as you are to our blessed Lord, and yet profess himself a loyal and devoted subject, you yourselves shall assign to him the designation he would merit, and, in so doing, shall assume it to yourselves.]

2. In their aims—

[These persons would have it supposed that they aim at advancing the honour of their God. But, in fact, there is nothing further from their thoughts than this. Many seek only to maintain a good character before men: and those who are less actuated by worldly applause, yet think of nothing but satisfying their own minds, and forming for themselves some specious ground for self-complacency and self-dependence. But as God said to the Jews by the Prophet Zechariah, “When ye fasted and mourned, did ye at all fast unto me, even unto me? And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did not ye eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves^d?” so must it be said to those whom we have before described: they shew, by their very best services, that they have no view beyond themselves; when, if they were really upright before God, they would, “whether they ate or drank, or whatever they did, do all to the glory of God^e.”]

^d Zech. vii. 5, 6.

^e 1 Cor. x. 31.

3. In the whole of their spirit and conduct—

[They would be thought to possess a Christian spirit: but there are few, if any, in the world more proud, more uncharitable, or more intolerant than they. They hold in contempt those who differ from them, whether they be religious or profane: the godly, as possessing an unfashionable and contemptible religion; and the profane, as destitute of the very appearance of religion. As for those who are living nigh to God in the enjoyment of his presence and in the prospect of his glory, these Pharisaical persons can scarcely endure them. In their sight, all spiritual religion is no other than conceit and vanity and hypocrisy: and those who possess it are deemed “as the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all things,” and, consequently, as worthy of universal reprobation. In every age of the world the mere formalists have thus persecuted the people of God; and have thus shewn themselves, in the midst of all their pretended zeal for good works, “the children of the devil.”]

SEE, then, Brethren,

1. What need we have to examine our state before God—

[We may be extremely zealous about the impositions and enactments of men, whilst we are adverse to the commands of God: and we may greatly honour God with our lips, whilst our hearts are altogether enmity against him. Then let us judge ourselves by the word of God, and by the examples of the primitive saints: for if in our whole spirit and deportment we be not followers of Christ and of his holy Apostles, whatever we may think of ourselves, we shall never be accepted of our God.

2. What need we have to rise above the trammels of a worldly religion—

[We have seen what the religion of carnal professors is: it is no better than hypocrisy; and as such it will be accounted in the last day. Nothing but vital piety will stand the test to which we shall be brought in that day. If, therefore, we be satisfied now with that which satisfies the world, we shall be grievously disappointed. If we will stand before God in the future judgment, “our doctrines” must be such as he has revealed, and our “worship” such as he will approve: for “not he that commendeth himself shall be approved, but he whom the Lord commendeth.”]

MCCCLXXI.

THE DAUGHTER OF THE CANAANITESS DISPOSSESSED.

Matt. xv. 28. *Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.*

RETIREMENT is necessary for all; especially for those who minister in holy things; but on certain occasions it must be sacrificed to the pressing calls of duty. Jesus had retired to the country near to Tyre and Sidon on purpose that he might enjoy some privacy; but this Canaanitess, having heard of him, went to importune him on behalf of her afflicted daughter: nor was her intrusion, however unseasonable, displeasing to him.

In discoursing on the relief afforded her, we shall notice,

I. The disposition and conduct of this distressed heathen—

The commendation which our blessed Lord himself bestowed on her, naturally leads us to a minute investigation of her character. Behold,

1. Her love—

[She considered her daughter's affliction as her own; and, when imploring relief for her, cried, "Have mercy upon ME!" and knowing that there was One able to help, she sought him out with diligence, and applied to him with importunity.

We too, like her, may be deeply affected with the bodily disorders of our children; and may make application to physicians in their behalf. But, though we know the power of Jesus to heal disorders, and the utter inefficacy of all human means without his blessing, how rarely do we spread our wants before HIM in fervent prayer! Yea, when we see the *souls* of our relatives possessed by Satan, and are assured that none but Jesus can deliver them, we profess perhaps to pity them, but find no disposition to intercede for them at the throne of grace; or, if we occasionally put up a petition for them, we shew by the coldness of our prayers how little regard we have for their eternal interests. Alas! that a heathen woman should have so much greater concern for the bodily welfare of her child, than we feel for the souls of those who are most nearly related to us!]

2. Her humility—

[Nothing could express more unfeigned humility than her demeanour did on this occasion. She addressed our Lord in terms of most profound respect, and prostrated herself before him with the deepest reverence: and, when he, by insinuation at least, compared her to a dog, she, instead of deeming it an insult, acquiesced in the appellation given her, and, with an ingenuity which nothing but the most unfeigned humility could have dictated, turned into a plea the name which seemed to convey nothing but discouragement; “Truth, Lord, I am a dog; yet as the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from the master’s table, without being considered as robbing the children, so, if thou grant me this one favour, it need not be any diminution of the mercy which thou hast treasured up for the Jews, in comparison of whom I am worthily esteemed a dog.”

Thus should we also conduct ourselves in all our addresses at the throne of grace; our posture should be humble, our spirit contrite, and our acknowledgments full of self-loathing and self-abhorrence.]

3. Her faith—

[This, as being the root of all, our Lord more especially commended. Indeed her faith was exceeding great: she beheld him as “the Lord, the Son of David,” the true Messiah. She believed him *able* to effect a cure, when it far surpassed all human power; yea, she believed that he could effect it at a distance, and by a word only. She was no less persuaded of his *willingness* to grant her petition; and therefore she persevered in her request in despite of all her discouragements. And, when our Lord declared that her request was granted, she departed with as full a persuasion that her daughter was delivered from the unclean spirit, as if she had seen the change accomplished before her eyes.

What an admirable pattern was she in this respect! It is thus that we also should approach him, not doubting either his ability or willingness to help us; and, when we hear his gracious declarations, we should trust in them with the fullest assurance that they shall be accomplished to us.]

4. Her patience—

[When first she besought our Lord, he took no notice of her. When she followed him with her entreaties, insomuch that the disciples, merely to get rid of her, became her advocates, he refused to hear her intercessions, and assigned to them a reason which to them appeared unanswerable. When she still, with increasing humility and fervour, urged her request, she also was repulsed, and that too in terms which

might have been interpreted as reproachful and injurious. Now persons in bitter anguish of mind are peculiarly susceptible of neglect, and much more of insult, especially from those of whom they had entertained a high opinion, and from whom they had expected a very different treatment. But, instead of being irritated, she endured all with the meekest submission^a, and determined to persevere till she should obtain her request.

Thus, when answers to prayers are delayed, we should continue urging our petitions, saying, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me^b." Nor should any thing ever induce us to entertain hard thoughts of God, or to murmur at his dispensations towards us, seeing that we deserve nothing at his hands but shame and contempt.]

While we admire the conduct of this woman, let us also contemplate,

II. The behaviour of the Lord Jesus towards her—

For some time he seemed to act in a manner unworthy of himself—

[Towards all others he shewed himself kind and condescending, and ready to administer the relief they solicited. Yea, he frequently almost obtruded himself upon the notice of men, and urged them, as it were, to ask for blessings at his hands. Even to the most abandoned of all characters he displayed this readiness to impart mercy^c; but towards this distressed suppliant he seemed destitute of all sympathy or compassion. He had indeed reasons abundantly sufficient to justify his conduct: he chose to draw forth the grace that was in her heart, and thereby to reprove the indifference of those who called themselves exclusively the children of God. By the delay too he rendered the benefit more acceptable to the woman, and the woman herself a brighter pattern unto us.

In a similar way, and for similar reasons, he sometimes hides his face from us, and turns, as it were, a deaf ear to our complaints; and, if we listened to the dictates of impatience and unbelief, we should be ready to exclaim, "What profit is there that we should call upon him?"]

But at last he answered her most sanguine expectations—

[He who had appeared so regardless of her cry, at last bare testimony to the greatness of her faith. How cheering must his commendations have been to her disconsolate spirit!

^a How different was her conduct, though a heathen, from David's under a far less disappointment! 1 Sam. xxv. 21, 22.

^b Gen. xxxii. 26.

^c John iv. 10.

And how has he shewn to us, that there may be great faith even where we suppose there is little, or perhaps none at all; and that when we account no terms too humiliating whereby to express our vileness, he approves and even admires the graces that we exercise!

With this *condescension in his manner* of shewing mercy, he manifested the greatest *liberality in the favour* he conferred: HE MADE HER OWN WISHES THE MEASURE OF HIS GIFTS. Nor will he shew less kindness to us, if we call upon him with our whole hearts. "What will ye that I should do unto you?" is his address to every one of us: and when we have made known our requests, he will say to each, "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt." With respect to temporal mercies, he will give or withhold as he foresees will be best for us: but in spiritual things he will do for us not only what we ask, but "exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think."]

We may LEARN from hence, that,

1. There is no respect of persons with God—

[No man can say, God will not hear me, because I am not of the number of his elect: for we cannot tell who are, or who are not, the elect of God, any farther than we are enabled to judge by their respective fruits. There is no man of any nation, or any character, who shall not find favour with God, if he seek it earnestly through the Lord Jesus Christ. Let secret things then be left to God; and let all, whether they account themselves dogs or children, seek a portion of that bread which came down from heaven. So shall their souls be liberated from Satan's yoke, and experience the saving efficacy of the Redeemer's word.]

2. Persevering prayer will and must prevail—

[Never was there an instance wherein the prayer of faith failed of success. It has opened the windows of heaven^d; and imposed, if we may so speak, restraints upon the Deity himself^e. If we can only wait patiently upon the Lord, he will soon pluck our feet out of the mire, and "put a new song into our mouths, even a thanksgiving unto our God^f." Let us then "pray, and not faint." Let us call upon the Lord, and "give him no rest till he arise" for our help^g. Then shall we assuredly succeed at last, and find, that his answers, however delayed, are vouchsafed in the fittest season, and in the most perfect correspondence with our necessities.]

^d Jam. v. 17, 18.

^e Exod. xxxii. 10, 11, 14.

^f Ps. xl. 1—3.

^g Isai. lxii. 7.

MCCCLXXII.

GREAT MULTITUDES HEALED.

Matt. xv. 30, 31. *And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them: insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel.*

EVERY miracle which our Lord performed suggests to us some peculiar subjects of profitable meditation. But we shall not now dwell upon any one act, however great or benevolent; our attention at this time will be fixed upon a more than ordinary exertion of omnipotence, the working of miracles *in a mass*, if we may so speak. We behold Jesus healing great multitudes of persons who laboured under a variety of disorders; which circumstance may very properly lead us to inquire,

I. What sensations must this exercise of divine power have excited?

A more interesting spectacle cannot be conceived than that which was exhibited on this occasion. Consider the impression that must have been made,

1. On the persons healed—

[It could not fail but that the persons, who had been healed instantly, and without any painful operation, must be deeply affected with the mercy bestowed on them. With what fixedness of attention must the *blind*, whose eyes had been opened, survey their benefactor! They would feel no disposition to gratify their curiosity by gazing on the wonders of creation: neither the meridian sun, nor the face of nature enlightened by it, would for one moment attract their notice. The restorer of their visual powers would engross their whole minds; nor would they turn their eyes from him for a moment, unless to wipe away the tears of gratitude and joy that would stream as from an overflowing fountain. With what exquisite delight would the *deaf* listen to the voice of him who had unstopped their ears! with what insatiable avidity would they drink in the sound, while, with the teachableness of little children, they received his gracious instructions! As for the *dumb*, whose tongues were loosened, they would, by an involuntary and irresistible impulse, fill the air with acclamations and hosannahs,

unless that the dread of interrupting the discourses of their Lord should awe them into silence. The *lame* and *maimed* (many of whom perhaps had not only their strength renewed, but their limbs, that had suffered amputation^a, perfectly restored) how would *they* exult and leap for joy, clapping their hands in ecstasy, and glorifying the author of their mercies! We may be assured of this from what is recorded of the cripple whom Peter healed^b. Methinks the assembly would be like a choir of ten thousand instruments, whose notes were exceeding various, but all in perfect harmony.]

2. On the surrounding multitude—

[The spectators, many of whom were friends and relatives of those that had been healed, doubtless participated in the general joy. Their feelings however were probably less ecstatic, because their own personal interest was not so nearly concerned. But their astonishment at the wonders performed, their satisfaction in the success of their own labours, and their sympathy with those whose maladies had been removed, could not fail of exciting in their minds the most pleasing sensations. When the wife or husband, the parent or child, saw the object of his warmest affections restored to health, and exercising with activity and vigour the faculties that had been renewed, surely he would lift up his eyes to heaven with devoutest gratitude, or prostrate himself upon the ground in profoundest adoration. When, in addition to the mercy his relatives had received, he beheld others in like circumstances with himself, and every moment fresh monuments of mercy rising before his eyes, we may conceive him overwhelmed with the sight and lost in amazement.]

3. On Jesus himself—

[Could Jesus be an unconcerned spectator of the bliss he was diffusing? Could he, who wept at the grave of Lazarus, refuse to sympathize with this adoring multitude? It was one of his most common sayings, that it is more blessed to give than to receive^c; and doubtless he experienced the truth of it on this occasion. Let us then consider the joy excited in the breast of every individual that had been relieved; let us consolidate and compress it, as it were, into one mass; and then we may have some faint conception of what Jesus felt, while he was communicating such abundant happiness. He would not fail to adore, with inexpressible, though perhaps hidden, ardour, his heavenly Father, for making him the channel of so many blessings. But Jesus' happiness would be widely different from

^a This may be implied in the word *καλλούς*. See Mark ix. 43.

^b Acts iii. 8.

^c Acts xx. 35.

that of those whom he relieved. *His* would be tempered with pity for their spiritual maladies, of which, alas! they had but little sense; and his praises would be mixed with prayers, that they might flock around him to obtain those richer benefits, of which their present cures were but imperfect emblems.]

Not to indulge mere useless speculations on this exercise of divine power, let us inquire,

II. What reflections should it suggest to our minds?

If every separate miracle be replete with instruction to us, much more may this accumulation of miracles afford us matter of useful

IMPROVEMENT—

1. Let *us* seek healing from the hands of Jesus—

[It may be that our *bodies* are preserved in the unimpaired use of all their faculties. But are not our *souls* diseased? Have we no intellectual blindness from which we need deliverance? Do not our tongues need to be loosened, our ears to be unstopped, or our limbs to be invigorated, for the daily performance of our spiritual duties? Surely, if we will examine our hearts, we shall find that the people who thronged to our Lord, were not in a more pitiable condition than ourselves; yea, we are incomparably more miserable than they, because the consequences of our disorders are so much more awful, and our desire for the removal of them is so weak and faint. Let us seek a deep conviction of this truth. Let us, under a sense of our extreme wretchedness, apply to Jesus, and interest our friends and relatives in our behalf. Thus shall the predictions that were *literally* fulfilled by the miracles before us, receive their true, though mystical, accomplishment in the renovation of our souls^d.]

2. Let us on no account limit the power and grace of Christ—

[The hand which, so easily and with such compassion, dispensed the blessings of health and strength, can surely with the same facility administer to our wants. Our lusts are so inveterate and our habits so deeply rooted, as to destroy the remotest hope of ever rescuing ourselves from their dominion. But the power and compassion of Jesus are the same as ever. The lapse of seventeen hundred years has made no change in him. “His hand is not shortened that it cannot save, nor is his ear heavy that it cannot hear.” Let us then guard against every unworthy, unbelieving thought. Let us be persuaded

^d Isai. xxxv. 5, 6.

that he is "able to save us to the very uttermost;" and that "he will cast out none who come unto him."]

3. Let us glorify God *with* and *for* all the faculties we possess—

[Our bodily and mental powers are rich mercies from the hand of God, and should be exerted continually in promoting his glory. But, if our eyes have been opened to behold the light of his truth; if our ears have been unstopped, so that we can hear the voice of the good shepherd; if our tongues have been loosed to speak of his name; and if our feet have been strengthened to run the way of his commandments; it becomes us to imitate the multitudes who surrounded him on this occasion. There should not be a cold heart, or an inactive member, throughout this whole assembly. We should all either be filled with admiration of his goodness, or, with ecstatic ardour, render him the tribute of incessant praise. Were we thus occupied, we should enjoy a very heaven upon earth. We cannot conceive a better idea of heaven than if we set before our eyes this adoring multitude. Do we see Jesus encircled by them, every eye fixed on HIM, every tongue sounding HIS praises, every soul ascribing all its happiness to HIS power and grace? What is this but heaven? Let us then resemble them, or rather far outstrip them, in our acclamations, forasmuch as our mercies infinitely exceed those which were enjoyed by them. This will be an improvement as beneficial to ourselves as it will be instructive to others, and honourable to "the God of Israel"—]

MCCCLXXIII.

AGAINST FORMALITY AND INDIFFERENCE.

Matt. xvi. 6. *Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed, and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.*

EVERY object around us is capable of affording us much important instruction. Our blessed Lord took occasion from all the common affairs of life, and all the things that presented themselves to his view, to lead his Disciples to the contemplation of heavenly things. It happened that his Disciples had neglected to take with them a proper supply of bread; and consequently that they would be necessitated to procure some on the other side of the lake, whither they were going. In reference to this circumstance he

bade them beware of a certain kind of leaven. They, not apprehending his meaning, supposed that his words were to be taken in a *literal* sense: but our Lord, bringing to their remembrance the miraculous supplies of bread which he had recently and repeatedly afforded them, shewed them, that his caution had a *spiritual* import, and that it referred, not to bread, but to certain pernicious doctrines, of which they were to beware.

We propose,

I. To shew what the caution refers to—

If the characters of the Pharisees and the Sadducees be duly considered, it will appear that our Lord cautioned his Disciples against,

1. A formal, hypocritical religion—

[The Pharisees laid a very great stress on forms; and multiplied them, not only beyond what the law of Moses prescribed, but even to the subversion of moral duties^a. At the same time they were extremely negligent in matters of more importance^b. Amidst their high professions of religion, they sought only the applause of men^c, and their own temporal advantage^d. With respect to real piety, they were not only destitute of it^e, but adverse to it in the highest degree^f. Some few among them indeed were more upright^g; but in general they were proud, worldly, hypocritical^h.

And what is the religion of the generality amongst ourselves? Do not the greater part of those who appear to respect religion, rest in some outward observances? They attend the public worship; they go to the table of the Lord; they read the Scriptures occasionally, and say their prayers at stated seasons: but their hearts are glued to the world; and they are more anxious to be thought religious than to be so, and to gain the applause of man than to secure the honour that cometh of God.

Whether such a state can be acceptable to God, judge yeⁱ.]

2. An indifference about all religion—

[The Sadducees were the free-thinkers of the day: they denied the resurrection of the body, and the immortality of the soul^k; and formed their notions of religion without any

^a Mark vii. 8—13. ^b Matt. xxiii. 23. ^c Matt. xxiii. 5—7.

^d Matt. v. 14, 25. ^e Matt. v. 20.

^f Matt. xxiii. 13, 31. with Acts xiii. 50. ^g Phil. iii. 5, 6.

^h Matt. xxiii. 25—28. ⁱ Luke xvi. 15. ^k Acts xxiii. 8.

just regard to the Holy Scriptures. Whatever was contrary to their preconceived opinions, they ridiculed as enthusiasm¹. Their lives, as might be expected, were in perfect consistency with their sentiments: they lived, almost as much as the heathen themselves, "without God in the world."

Behold in them, as in a mirror, the present generation! The rich, the gay, the men of learning and philosophy, are too generally of this description. Though they have never searched the Scriptures for themselves, they are as confident of the truth of their sentiments as they could be, if they had laboured ever so diligently to ascertain the mind of God. They laugh at all serious religion; and represent the hopes and fears, the joys and sorrows of a true Christian, as symptoms of melancholy, and as the offspring of a heated imagination.

Can we wonder that our blessed Lord cautioned his disciples against such a state as this? Or can any of us be too much on our guard against it?

The propriety of this caution will further appear, while we proceed,

II. To assign some reasons for it—

We shall not insist on any reasons that were peculiar to the Apostles; but touch rather on those that are applicable to every age. The caution is necessary at all times:

1. Because of our proneness to the evils we are guarded against—

[We need only notice the habits of all around us, from youth to manhood, and from maturity to old age; we shall then see to what every man is by nature inclined. Pleasure beguiles the earlier periods of life, and care corrodes our advanced or declining years. Nor is this peculiar to any time or place. In these respects, human nature is every where, and at all times, the same. Some indeed are more inclined to Pharisaic pride, and others to Sadducean indifference: and it is common to see persons, after a life of dissipation, passing from one to the other of these states. But where do we find those who are of themselves inclined to unreserved piety? Who ever was by nature humble and contrite? Who ever by nature hated all kinds of sin, and delighted in the exercises of vital godliness? Instances of early piety, it is true, may be found: but their piety was the fruit of the Spirit, and not the product of unassisted nature.

Is not this then a reason why the caution should be given?

¹ Acts xvii. 32.

Surely, if all our natural propensities lead to one or other of the evils against which we are cautioned, it becomes us to be on our guard against them: nor can any expressions be too strong to warn us of our danger^m.]

2. Because of the fatal tendency of the evils themselves—

[The nature of “leaven” is to ferment till it has pervaded and changed the whole mass into which it is put. And well may these errors be designated by such a name. We have seen already that the heart of man by nature is impregnated with dispositions adverse to true religion. And how do these dispositions operate? Do they not work incessantly, till they vitiate the whole man? Do they not blind our understanding, and pervert our will, and sensualize our affections, and cause every part of our conduct to savour of ungodliness? Behold also in what manner they operate on those who turn away from the truth! For a season they have felt the influence of a better leaven, the grace of God: but, being drawn aside by temptation, they begin again to yield to their former corruptions: how soon do they lose all their spirituality of mind, and become formal in their devotions, and indifferent at least, if not also adverse, to all which they before esteemed and relished! Whoever has observed the rapid and melancholy change which is often wrought in professors of religion through the influence of this leaven, will see cause enough why every disciple of Christ should be cautioned against it.]

3. Because of their ultimate effect—

[What must be the issue of a life spent in Pharisaic pride or Sadducean indifference, it is almost needless to suggest. But surely every man's own reflection should make him careful how he admits such leaven into his soul, or yields to its malignant influence: for eternal happiness and eternal misery are too important to be trifled with: the very word *eternity* is sufficient to make every man thoughtful and cautious.]

We will now endeavour,

III. To point out the means whereby it may be rendered effectual for our preservation—

Doubtless it is the Spirit of God only that can apply the word to our souls: and therefore we must above all things implore his almighty aid. But it may be

^m The words of our text are very emphatical, ὁρᾷτε καὶ προσέχετε* and in a parallel passage our Lord says, (Luke xii. 1.) πρῶτον προσέχετε, i. e. *above all things*.

useful to suggest some other hints for the carrying into effect the caution in the text.

1. Get your souls deeply impressed with the principles of the Gospel—

[The Gospel is “the rod of God’s strength,” wherewith he has wrought the most stupendous miracles; and it is that which he delights to make effectual to our salvation. Indeed there is something in its fundamental principles which is admirably calculated to counteract the influence of this leaven. It declares to us our lost estate; and proposes to us a Saviour, who bought us with his blood. Now who that is duly sensible of his guilt and danger, will yield to indifference? Who that discerns the fulness and excellency of Christ, will rest in any mere forms for his acceptance with God? Who, in short, that beholds the wonders of redeeming love, will harbour that accursed leaven that would rob him of all its benefits? Only let us come to God through Christ, and the love of Christ will constrain us to “purge out,” as far as possible, every atom of “the old leaven.”]

2. Be careful whom you choose as your associates—

[A man will, for the most part, drink into the spirit of his associates. Are they formal and worldly, or infidel and contemptuous? he can scarcely hope to escape the infection: “evil communications will corrupt good manners”; and “a little leaven will leaven the whole lump.” If, on the other hand, his companions be living in the fear of God, he will be instructed by their conversation, and edified by their example. The inference from this is clear. We need not to be often warned against exposing ourselves to the influence of a pestilential disorder. Why then should we not beware of the contagion of sin and sinners? Surely in proportion as the soul is of more value than the body, our circumspection in reference to spiritual things should exceed that which we use respecting the things that pertain to the present life. With the apostle then we say, “Come out from among the world, and be separate, and touch not the unclean thing^p,” and let your associates be, like David’s, “the excellent of the earth, in whom was all his delight^q.”]

3. Endeavour to realize the thoughts of the future judgment—

[In the last day every thing will appear in its proper colours. Vital godliness will then no longer be seen through the medium of prejudice: its light will shine out of obscurity;

ⁿ 1 Cor. xv. 33. ^o Gal. v. 9. ^p 2 Cor. vi. 17. ^q Ps. xvi. 3.

and its excellence will be universally acknowledged. Then too the Sadducean scoffers and the Pharisaic formalists will find how awfully they have been deluded. "Evil will no more be put for good, nor good for evil;" but the quality of every man's actions will be infallibly determined, and a suitable recompence will be given to him, either in the joys of heaven or the miseries of hell. What can ever influence us, if such an awful consideration as this fail to put us on our guard? Could we but keep alive in our hearts the expectation of that day, we should determine, through grace, to think and act for ourselves: we should "not follow a multitude to do evil;" but should take a decided part in the cause of Christ: we should not participate "the leaven of error or hypocrisy^r," but eat "the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth^s."]

^r Luke xii. 1.

^s 1 Cor. v. 6—8.

MCCCLXXIV.

PETER'S CONFESSION OF CHRIST REWARDED.

Matt. xvi. 15—19. *He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*

WHILST some are laying an undue stress upon the smaller differences which subsist between Christians, others put all the Christian world together in one indiscriminate mass; conceiving, that those who are one in name, are one also in reality. But both of these parties are wrong; for the differences about Church government, and about some abstruser doctrines of our religion, are of very little signification before God, and ought to be maintained by us with moderation and mutual concessions: whereas those differences which respect our attachment to the Lord Jesus Christ are of infinite importance; they put asunder the various classes of Christians, and either

prove or disprove their very title to the name. Our blessed Lord has strongly marked this in a conversation which he held with his Disciples. He asked them, What notions the generality of his professed followers entertained concerning him? To this they replied, that some supposed him to be John the Baptist; others, Elijah; others, Jeremiah, or some other of the ancient prophets risen from the dead. Then he put to them the interrogation in our text, and inquired, Whom *they* supposed him to be? The answer which Jesus received on this occasion, was quite satisfactory to him, and met with tokens of his most decided approbation. This answer formed the great line of distinction between those who were merely nominal disciples, and those who were so in spirit and in truth.

In our further consideration of this passage we shall notice,

I. Peter's confession of Christ—

On many occasions had the Disciples, either individually or collectively, acknowledged Jesus to be the true Messiah^a. On one occasion in particular, they affirmed it with a more than ordinary confidence^b. But this confession being so signally noticed by our Lord himself, we shall embrace this opportunity of considering it more fully.

Peter here justly represents the character of Christ:

1. His high origin—

[The term “Son of God” was understood by the Jews as of so high an import, that when Jesus claimed that title, he was considered as affecting an equality with Jehovah, and actually “making himself God^c.” In this sense Peter acknowledged him to be, not a mere man, but infinitely above all created beings, “Emmanuel, God with us,” even “God over all, blessed for evermore.” Peter knew that the Father at his baptism had borne witness to him by an audible voice from heaven: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” He had even been an eye-witness of such a manifestation of his glory, as had convinced him fully, that he *was* God; and at the

^a John i. 49. and xi. 27. and Matt. xiv. 33.

^b John vi. 69; in the discussion of which passage, we have mentioned it only in a transient way.

^c John x. 30, 33, 36.

same time he had heard precisely the same testimony to him from heaven, which had been before given at his baptism. The remembrance of this was never effaced from his mind; inso-much that many years afterwards, he referred to it as affording to his mind a demonstration that Christ was possessed of more than human majesty and glory^d. And on other occasions also we are assured, that his disciples "beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father^e." This part of Peter's confession then must be understood as equivalent to that declaration of another Apostle, that "the Father hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, who is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person^f."]

2. His divine mission—

["Thou art *the* Christ^g," the very person promised from the foundation of the world. Thou art "the Seed of the woman, that is to bruise the serpent's head;" "the Seed of Abraham, in whom all nations are to be blessed;" "the Shiloh that was to come, before that the sceptre should finally depart from Judah:" "the Son of David, that shall reign over his kingdom for ever and ever." Thou art He "of whom Moses and the prophets have written" so much, and in whom all that they have written shall be accomplished. It is true, Lord, we have but a very indistinct knowledge of thee at present; but we know enough to be assured, that thou art "the Christ," the Saviour of the world. This is the full persuasion of us all. As for those persons with whom others would identify thee, they were but thy servants, sent to prepare the world for thy coming: they were as little meteors in their day; but thou art "the bright and morning star," or rather, "the Sun of righteousness that is arisen upon us, with healing in thy wings." In thee we recognize both "the root and offspring of David," "David's Son and David's Lord:" in thee we acknowledge that Divine person, of whom God has said, "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee^h;" and of whom Daniel speaks, as "Messiah, the Prince, who should make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousnessⁱ."]

Though our Lord knew beforehand what Peter's answer would be, he speaks of it as if surprised, and with peculiar approbation: which leads us to notice,
II. The commendation with which it was honoured—

Our Lord declares that no man could have such views of him unless he were taught of God—

^d Luke ix. 28—35. with 2 Pet. i. 16—18. ^e John i. 14.

^f Heb. i. 2, 3. ^g The force of the article is here preserved.

^h Ps. ii. 7. ⁱ Dan. ix. 24, 25.

[The prejudices of men were so strong in favour of a temporal Messiah, that no man could overcome them, unless he were enabled by the special assistance of God himself. And though the miracles of our Lord appeared to justify his pretensions to that office, yet his low condition in life, and the universal rejection of him by the great and learned, were a stumbling-block which no man of himself was able to remove. If indeed the Scriptures had been carefully examined, and compared with all that was accomplished in Christ, they were even then sufficient to establish the conclusion that Jesus was the Christ. But no man had eyes to see this truth, till the veil was removed from his heart, and his understanding was enlightened by the Spirit of God. And thus it is at this day: we say not, that any man is to expect a new revelation, or to be inspired in the way that the Apostles were; *this* is not now to be expected by any man, the canon of revelation being completed, and God having made known all that is necessary for our salvation: but “our understandings (like those of the Apostles) must be opened, to understand the Scriptures;” nor till we are taught of God can we ever have that view of Christ which is exhibited in the text. We may, it is true, obtain a *speculative* view of Christ’s person and office from books and the teaching of men: but a *spiritual* and *practical* view of them, none but God himself can give us. We notice in Peter’s confession an *acquiescence*, an *affiance*, an *exultation* in the truths he utters: and *that* is the view which “flesh and blood cannot reveal unto us, and which can be revealed only by our heavenly Father.” To this Divine agency the Apostles ascribed all their knowledge of Christ^k; and they unequivocally declare that no human being can derive it from any other source: “No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost^l.”]

He congratulates Peter on the clear knowledge which he possessed—

[Well might our Lord reply, “Blessed art thou, Simon;” for blessed indeed he was, in having such views as these: he was blessed in them, whether we regard them as *means of obtaining* the Divine favour, or as *evidences of having obtained* it. On such a knowledge of Christ all his prospects of eternal happiness depended: “Thus to know Christ is life eternal” — — — But, inasmuch as the possession of it evinced that he had been taught of God, it shewed that God had a favour towards him, and had “set him apart for his own” “peculiar treasure:” this very gift was to him a pledge and earnest of future blessings. What then could constitute a man blessed, if

^k 1 John v. 20.

^l 1 Cor. xii. 3.

this did not? or what can rob a man of blessedness, who is possessed of such views, and such desires? I ask not whether you be living in the enjoyment of temporal honours, or even of necessary comforts: if you resemble Peter, you are blessed, though you should be as poor and destitute as Lazarus himself; "Blessed are your eyes, if they see, and your ears, if they hear," these glorious, these heavenly truths.]

But we are further called to notice,

III. The distinction with which they were rewarded—

What was here spoken to Peter referred *primarily*, but not *exclusively*, to him. The other Apostles united with Peter in the confession; and our Lord comprehended them also in the commendation and distinction conferred upon him: yet, inasmuch as Peter had manifested a pre-eminent zeal in so directly and confidently acknowledging Christ, he was honoured in some respects with a peculiar and pre-eminent reward. Our Lord promised him,

1. That he should lay the foundation of the Christian Church—

[Christ had before given to Peter the name of "Cephas," which in *the Syriac* language is of the same import with "Peter" in *the Greek*: they both mean, "a Rock^m." 'Now,' says our Lord, 'thou hast acknowledged me to be the Christ; and I acknowledge thee to be justly and deservedly named "Peter:"' nay, in reference to thy name, I declare that I will build my Church on this confession which thou hast madeⁿ; and though the power and policy of hell^o will be exerted to

^m John i. 42.

ⁿ As far as we suppose Peter himself to be that rock, we must understand it as relating, not to himself *personally*, but to *the truth he had uttered*. CHRIST, personally considered, is the only true foundation on which the Church is built: (1 Cor. iii. 11.) Prophets and Apostles were such, only as proclaiming his word, on which mankind were to found their hopes. (Eph. ii. 20.) It is possible that Christ might point to himself as that rock; (just as he did on another occasion, John ii. 19, 21.) but still this truth, *that he is the Messiah, the Son of God*, is the one foundation of all our hopes.

^o By "the gates of hell" some understand "*death*;" and consider the expression as intimating, that though *death* cuts off individual believers, it shall never extirpate them from the earth: there shall always be a holy seed to serve the Lord. And even the persons who are removed by *death* shall rise again, and, having triumphed over death, shall reign with Christ in glory for evermore. But we prefer

destroy my Church, they shall never prevail, either against the Church itself, or against any individual that is founded on the truth which thou hast uttered^p — — — The work is mine; “*I will build it:*” but the foundation shall be that which is now laid by thee: and as long as thy name shall be known in the world, thou shalt be remembered as a bold champion for the truth, and as having, even at this early period, laid the foundation on which my Church shall stand for ever.’]

2. That he should be a principal instrument in establishing and governing the Church—

[Keys were used as an emblem of power; and the person invested with them, had the control and management of the house or state committed to him. Hence of Eliakim, who was to succeed Shebna, the treasurer, in his high office, it is said, “The key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open^q.” And a similar metaphor is used in reference to Christ, to whom the government of the Church is exclusively committed^r. ‘Now,’ says our Lord, “I will give unto thee, Peter, the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” We have not the smallest reason to believe that there was any *exclusive* power given to Peter; (nor, if there had been, is there any mention of its being transferred to the bishops and popes of Rome as his successors:) but there was a most honourable distinction conferred upon him, namely, that of opening the Church both to Jews and Gentiles; the former of which he did on the day of Pentecost; and the latter when, in consequence of repeated visions, he went and preached the Gospel to Cornelius and his company^s. But besides this, our Lord told him also that “whatever he should bind on earth should be bound in heaven, and whatsoever he should loose on earth, should be loosed in heaven.” Though Peter, in his conduct, was fallible, and actually fell into both sins and errors, yet, as inspired of God to preach and write for the edification of the Church, he was infallible: and his word, whether it related to doctrine or discipline, has been a standard of truth in every age. In this indeed the other disciples are united with him^t: and to this hour, whatever is declared by them to be lawful or unlawful, to raise men to heaven or to consign them over to perdition, is confirmed and ratified in heaven, and shall be so

the sense we have given to the words. The gates of cities constituted in a great measure their strength; and they were the places where public assemblies were held, and justice was administered. Hence “the gates of hell” might well signify the power and policy of hell.

^p Jer. i. 19.

^q Isai. xxii. 20—22.

^r Rev. iii. 7.

^s Acts ii. and x.

^t John xx. 23.

to all eternity. And if any Church admit or expel members agreeably to their word, such admission or expulsion will be accompanied with a corresponding acceptance or rejection before the throne of God^u.

Such was the distinction conferred on this favoured servant of the Lord: and in this was fulfilled that universal promise, "Them that honour me I will honour."]

From this important subject we may LEARN,

1. How to attain the knowledge of Christ—

[Reading and human instruction are good in their place; but they are not of themselves effectual: we must have "the unction of the Holy One that must teach us all things," or else we shall, after all, continue ignorant of the truth of God. It is "the Spirit alone that can guide us into all truth." Hence we are directed by Solomon to "lift up our voice for understanding, as well as to search for her as for hid treasures:" and St. Paul prays for the Ephesian Church, "that God would give them the Spirit of *wisdom* and *revelation* in the knowledge of Christ, the eyes of their understanding being enlightened^x." If therefore we would attain this knowledge, let us not lean to our own understanding, or look to "flesh and blood to reveal it to us," but pray unto God to "shine into our hearts to give it us^y."]

2. How to improve it—

[Let us be ready on all proper occasions to "confess Christ before men." How astonishing is it that any should be ashamed of Christ, ashamed to acknowledge him as their Lord and Saviour! What is there to be ashamed of in loving him, serving him, rejoicing in him? Shall wicked men be so daring as to "glory in their shame," and shall we be so pusillanimous as to be ashamed of our glory? O let it never be: let us, like Peter, confess Christ; and then, like Peter, we shall be confessed by him: and no sooner shall we say to him, "Thou art Christ, my Lord," than he will say, 'Thou art Simon, my servant and my friend.' Even "before his Father and his holy angels will he acknowledge us" as *his*, and proclaim us "blessed."]

3. How to secure all the benefits dependent on it—

[Opposition we must expect from earth and hell; but he will be our succour and defence. He has said, that none shall prevail against us; and we have only to plead his promise, and rest confidently on his word. Whom did he ever disappoint? "Who ever trusted in him and was confounded?" Who ever

^u Matt. xviii. 18.

^x Eph. i. 17, 18.

^y 2 Cor. iv. 6.

expected the written word to be accomplished, and did not find God true to his engagements? No, verily: what has been bound on earth, has been bound in heaven, and what has been loosed on earth, has been loosed in heaven. "Heaven and earth shall pass away; but not one jot or tittle of his word shall ever fail." In the midst of all our conflicts then we may begin the Apostle's triumphant song^z—and continue it in all our diversified conditions, till we commence "the Song of Moses and of the Lamb" in heaven.]

^z Rom. viii. 33—39.

MCCCLXXV.

PETER'S MISTAKEN TENDERNESS REPROVED.

Matt. xvi. 21—23. *From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.*

IN nothing is divine wisdom more necessary than in judging what regard is to be had to times and circumstances: for, if we will not exert ourselves till every difficulty is removed, we shall scarcely ever act at all: and, on the other hand, if we precipitately attempt to effect at once all that may appear desirable, we shall often defeat our best intentions. Our blessed Lord intended to reveal himself fully to his Disciples; but he would not do it at first, because they were not able to bear it: and when he had acknowledged himself to them to be the Messiah, he forbade them to divulge it; because he saw, that the knowledge of it would lead the people to proclaim him king, and thereby stir up all the power of the Romans to destroy him. Nor were the Apostles themselves sufficiently instructed yet awhile to represent that truth to others. They still thought of nothing but a temporal Messiah: and therefore, when our Lord began to predict his own sufferings and death, Peter would not hear of any such

things; but presumptuously told his Master, that such events neither could, nor should, take place.

I. *The rebuke which this brought upon him*, will be a profitable subject for our consideration—

His offence was certainly heinous—

[Our Lord had now spoken plainly and openly of his approaching death and resurrection. He had done so on purpose to counteract the erroneous expectations of his Disciples, and at the same time to prepare their minds for the approaching events. We grant that such predictions must have staggered them exceedingly, considering what their views and expectations were: but did it become Peter to contradict him, and to declare that such events should never come to pass? He had but that instant before confessed Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the living God. Why then did he not believe his assertions? Why did he presume to set up his own wisdom against that of his Divine Master? We give him credit indeed for expressing himself with tenderness and affection^a: but it became him to learn, not to teach; to submit, and not to dictate.]

In the reproof the peculiar enormity of it was pointed out—

[Two things in particular our Lord specified as deserving the severest reprehension. One was, *that he was casting a stumbling-block in his Master's way*. Jesus Christ had come from the bosom of his Father to redeem mankind by his own precious blood. But Peter, through false tenderness, would have had him spare himself, and prefer his own personal ease to the salvation of a ruined world: he would have persuaded Jesus to set aside all the counsels of the Father, to violate his own covenant engagements, to rescind all his own gracious purposes, and to leave mankind to perish in their sins, rather than submit to those sufferings which were necessary for the accomplishment of the great scheme of redemption. What could Satan himself wish for more than this? Hence our Lord was filled with indignation against him, and addressed him in the very terms in which he had once addressed the tempter in the wilderness: "Get thee behind me, Satan:" 'however much I respect thee in general, I regard thee in this matter, not as a friend, but as an *adversary*^b: not as an Apostle, but as *Satan* himself, speaking in and by thee: the tendency of thy speech is to put *a stumbling-block in my way*: "thou art *an offence* unto me^c."']

^a προσλαβόμενος, taking him kindly and affectionately by the hand. Compare Rom. xiv. 1.

^b This is the meaning of the word "Satan."

^c σκάνδαλόν.

The other thing which our Lord condemned him for was, *that he manifested a carnal and worldly spirit*. God expects that his creatures should seek only his glory : and that personal considerations should be of no weight with them in comparison of that. But men prefer their own ease and honour, and are content to glorify God only so far as they can do it consistently with their own temporal comfort. ‘Now,’ says our Lord, ‘you are “not savouring of the things of God, but of those that are of men;” and are wishing me to act upon these low and carnal principles, instead of on those high principles which become my work and office. In this view therefore, as well as in the former, thou deservest no other name than that of “Satan.” It is *his* great aim to banish from the world that supreme regard for God which men ought universally to feel; and thou, in the advice thou hast given, hast shewn thyself to be under his influence, and hast, to the utmost of thy power, been furthering his designs. I would have thee therefore, and all my other disciples, know that I am greatly displeased with thee on this occasion^d.’]

Without dwelling longer on the occurrence itself, we shall proceed to observe, that,

II. *The instruction to be gathered from it* is also peculiarly worthy of our attention—

And here there is much that comes home to the business and bosoms of mankind. We may see in this little history,

1. How to estimate the love of Christ—

[The sufferings which awaited Jesus were such as no finite creature could have borne : yet when entreated to shun them, he not only refused to listen to the advice, but reprovéd it with a severity that he never used on any other occasion. ‘What! Spare myself? Avoid the sufferings that are necessary to expiate the guilt of men, and to satisfy the demands of law and justice? How can I leave mankind to perish in their sins? I cannot endure the thought : and I account him who suggests it to me as no better than Satan himself : yes, even the highly favoured Peter appears to me in the light of that malignant fiend, when he would damp the ardour of my love to man, or discourage the execution of my plans for his redemption.’]

View the answer in this light, and say, whether his “love was not such as many waters could not quench, neither could floods drown it?” Towards those who inflicted his sufferings

^d Our Lord, previous to his reply, turned about, and looked in a very significant way on all his other disciples. Mark viii. 33.

we behold nothing but kindness. To the man that betrayed him, "Friend, wherefore art thou come?" To those who came to apprehend him, "Whom seek ye?" To Peter, when denying him with oaths and curses, he spoke not a word, but gave him a look of pity and compassion. To his blood-thirsty murderers he also meekly submitted, praying and apologizing for them: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And, after all ranks and orders of men in Jerusalem had satiated their malice in destroying him, he commanded his "Gospel to be preached to all nations, *beginning at Jerusalem.*" But when he was entreated to avoid those sufferings, his indignation was extreme; nor were any terms too strong to express it. Well indeed might it be said of his love, that "it passeth knowledge." We admire the firmness with which St. Paul resolved to meet the sufferings that awaited him^e: but this was nothing in comparison of Christ's love to us.]

2. How to requite his love—

[On this our Lord insisted with peculiar emphasis. In the words following the text it is said, "*Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself,*" &c. But another Evangelist informs us, that he called the people to him on this occasion, that they, together with his disciples, might hear what was so highly interesting, so universally obligatory, and so unquestionably right and reasonable^f. He expatiated on the duties he required of all his followers, and declared, that all who would approve themselves to him, must deny themselves after his example, and be willing to lay down their lives for him^g. This at first perhaps sounds harsh: but if Jesus laid down his life for us, and was so intent upon it that he resented in the highest degree any suggestion that could be made against it, what does he not deserve at our hands? If he did that for us who were his enemies, what should not we be ready to do for him, our Lord and Saviour? Truly, if we had a thousand lives, we might well sacrifice them all for him — — Let us not then be ashamed to confess him, or afraid to suffer for him: but let us "follow him without the camp, bearing his reproach," and "esteem the reproach of Christ greater treasures than all the riches of the world."]

3. How to act towards those who offer us their friendly advice—

[We have before shewn how we are to act when menaced by the avowed enemies of Christ. But how are we to act towards those who profess themselves *his* friends? I answer, *Try their counsel, and examine carefully whether it savour of the things of*

^e Acts xxi. 11—13. ^f Mark viii. 34. ^g Mark viii. 35—38.

God or of man. Bring it to the test of Scripture, even though they should be apostles, or even angels, that offer it. That persons in their general habits are pious, is no reason that we should implicitly follow their advice in every thing; for the best of men are fallible, and liable to be biassed by their interests or passions: and if Satan can gain over them to his interests, he will make especial use of them for assaulting the holiest of men. By Eve he assaulted Adam; and Job also by *his* wife; and our Lord himself by his favourite Apostle, Peter. I say then, Whatever advice be given you, try it by the touchstone of God's word: if it savour of carnal ease and worldly prudence, beware how you follow it: if, on the contrary, it evidently have the glory of God in view, beware how you reject it. The direction of God himself is, "Try the spirits, whether they are of God:" "To the word and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, there is no light in them:" "Prove all things and hold fast that which is good." We grant that, in many cases, it may not be easy to discern between good and evil: and the affection of the adviser may blind our eyes to the sinfulness of the advice. But if we ourselves are habitually savouring the things of God, we shall have a spiritual discernment, which, like the senses of taste and smell, will enable us to perceive the noxious qualities of things, which in their outward appearance are good and wholesome. But it is the privilege of all to have God himself for their guide: look therefore to him, and "he will direct your paths:" "He will guide you by his counsel, till at last he bring you to glory."

MCCCLXXVI.

THE EXTENT AND IMPORTANCE OF A CHRISTIAN'S DUTY.

Matt. xvi. 24, 25. *Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.*

THE precepts of the Gospel are often considered as harsh and severe; but, if they were duly considered, there is not one of them, which would not appear highly reasonable. Perhaps there is not a stricter precept in the whole Bible than this before us, since it plainly declares, that no man shall ever enter into heaven, who is not willing to renounce every thing in

the world, yea, even his own life, for the sake of Christ. But can we think this too strict, if we observe the time and manner of its delivery? Our Lord had just foretold his own sufferings and death; and had reproved Peter with great severity for attempting to dissuade him from subjecting himself to such miseries: and “*then*” it was, that he gave this injunction to his followers. In this view we may conceive our Lord as saying, ‘Do I deny myself, and take up my cross, and even surrender up my life, from love to you? then do ye the same in obedience to me; if I do it willingly for your salvation, surely you cannot hesitate to do it for my glory.’

This precept then leads us to point out,

I. The extent of a Christian's duty—

To be Christians indeed, we must enter in at a strait gate, and walk in a narrow way: we must,

1. Deny ourselves—

[Since the first introduction of sin into the world men have cast off the love and fear of God, and have subjected themselves to the dominion of *self*. Instead of conforming themselves to the will of their Maker, and living wholly for his glory, they have made their own will, the *principle*, and their own honour or interest, the *end*, of all their actions. Christianity is intended to bring us back to the state from which we are fallen. The very first step towards our restoration is, to “deny *self*,” and to restore God to the dominion of which we have robbed him. Our inquiries must henceforth be, not, What do I choose? or, What will gratify *self*? but What does God command? and, What will glorify him? To “put off the old man,” to “mortify the deeds of the body,” to “crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts;” in a word, to deny self in all its actings, is the course, on which every Christian must enter, and which he must resolutely follow to the end of life.]

2. Take up our cross—

[Every Christian must of necessity have some cross to bear: for though there will be seasons of comparative rest, when the storms of persecution shall subside, yet, as long as there are any of “the serpent's seed” on earth, “the seed of the woman” will be treated by them as “the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all things.” But to this the Christian must submit: he must not expect to be above his Master, but

be willing to suffer in conformity to his example. He must not indeed bring trials on himself by his own misconduct: but, if the cross lie in his way, he should not be solicitous to avoid it; but rather should take it up and carry it. Nor, while he is bearing the cross, should he account it a heavy and insupportable load; but should glory in it, and “rejoice that he is counted worthy” to bear it. This too should be the *daily* habit of his mind^a. Let us view a malefactor bearing to the place of execution a part of the cross whereon he is shortly to be fixed^b, and then we shall see the degraded state in which the Christian must be content to walk in the midst of an ungodly world. If he be regarded with even a shadow of respect, he must consider it as gain, for which he did not stipulate, and which he had no right to look for.]

3. Follow Christ—

[While we profess to rely on Christ for our acceptance with God, we must also follow him as our pattern and example. In the whole of our conduct we must endeavour to “walk as he walked.” Though we are not to do in all respects the very things which he did, yet we are to manifest in all things the same spirit and temper. Like him, we must abhor sin even in thought; like him, sit loose to all the things of time and sense; like him devote ourselves entirely to our God. Nor are we to draw back when persecution arises, but still to “follow our Lord without the camp, bearing his reproach^c.” Yea, if such a death awaited us as our Lord himself endured, we are not to shrink back from it, but to go boldly forward: the language of our hearts must be, “None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto me, so that I may finish my course with joy^d.”]

Doubtless these things are difficult: but we shall not be deterred from duty by any difficulties, if we duly consider,

II. The importance of it—

On our faithfulness unto death our eternal salvation depends. It may be that we may be called to die for the sake of Christ—

[In the first ages of Christianity, martyrdom for the truth was common: and, since its establishment in the world, thousands have been called to sacrifice their lives for the sake of Christ. Nor are we to conclude from the rest that we enjoy, that our faith and patience shall never be put to the test.

^a Luke ix. 23.

^c Heb. xiii. 13.

^b Hence the word *furcifer*.

^d Acts xx. 24.

Indeed, there are few, if any, real Christians, who are not on some occasions made to endure the fiery trial, and to approve themselves as pure gold, by sustaining, without loss, the action of the fire. At all events we must in the habit of our minds be "ready, not only to be bound, but even to die at any time, and in any manner, for the name of the Lord Jesus^e."]

If, when called to suffer thus, we are found faithful, we shall be unspeakable gainers—

[We are assured, not only in the text, but in many other places, that, "if we suffer with Christ we shall also be glorified together with him;" and, that "our light and momentary afflictions shall work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Now what do we lose, when this poor frail life is taken from us? Nothing, but a few days or years of uncertain, and, at the best, painful existence upon earth. But what is our gain, the very instant our spirit has taken its flight? Who can conceive the rapture with which the disembodied soul will enter into the presence of its God? Who can form any idea of its joy, when it shall hear this plaudit from the Saviour's lips, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" Will any one *then* think he has endured too much for his Divine Master? Will any one *then* regret that he had not continued longer in this wretched world, and purchased a temporary ease at the price of eternal glory?]

If on the contrary we decline suffering, our loss will be inconceivably dreadful—

[We are plainly warned that "if we deny Christ, he will deny us;" and that "if we draw back, his soul shall have no pleasure in us." What then will a man gain by sacrificing his principles to his fears? he will protract the little space allotted for his natural life, and save himself from a few minutes of pain and torture: but he will forfeit all hope of eternal glory, and subject himself to the wrath of an incensed God. It is but a few days at most, before he must resign the life, which he is now so averse to part with: and what will his feelings be when the Saviour of the world shall say, 'Depart from me, I never knew thee; thou hadst no regard for me; I told thee long since that, if thou wouldst save thy life by denying me, thou shouldst have no part with my faithful followers: these on my right hand "loved not their lives unto death;" but thou wast of "the fearful and unbelieving, and shalt therefore take thy portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone^f.'"]

Do not these considerations evince the importance of our duty? and should they not stimulate us to perform it in its utmost extent?]

^e Acts xxi. 13.

^f Rev. xxi. 8.

Amongst the many REFLECTIONS arising from this subject, we may observe,

1. How different a thing is Christianity from what is generally supposed!

[It is generally thought that the embracing of certain tenets, with a conformity to some rites connected with them, is sufficient to constitute us real Christians. But religion is a practical thing: it enters into every part of our conduct; and must regulate us in every possible situation. It relaxes not its demands on account of any difficulties we may have to encounter; but provides us strength to surmount them, and a glorious reward when we have overcome. Let this then be fully known; that they, and they only, who, if put to the test, would be willing to die for Christ, are real Christians in the sight of God; and consequently, that they, and they only, will be saved in the day that he shall judge the quick and dead. How insufficient are we for these things; and how earnestly should we seek of God that grace which we stand in need of!]

2. How vain are the excuses which men offer for their neglect of duty!

[Every one is ready to urge the difficulties which lie in his way as an excuse for disobedience to the divine commands. But, what if our worldly interests be injured? what if we be called to "resist unto blood?" we must be steadfast, and immoveable. The only question is, Shall we obey God, or man? shall we regard our bodies, or our souls? Excuses serve but to deceive and ruin us. Let us then put them all away; for God cannot be deceived, and will not be mocked.]

3. How excellent a directory is here given us even in the most difficult cases!

[We may sometimes find it difficult to discern the path of duty: what then shall we do to avoid error? Let us follow the injunctions here given us. Let us inquire, What would my natural inclinations lead me to; or, what would any unconverted person do in my circumstances? The very reverse of *that* is the line that I will pursue; for, while I deny myself, I cannot greatly err. Again, What would the Lord Jesus Christ do in my circumstances? *That* I will do; for I cannot do wrong when I follow him. Such questions as these would tend more to remove our difficulties than all the abstract reasonings that could be brought forward; for, we shall always find, that, *an upright heart is the best casuist.*]

MCCCLXXVII.

THE WORTH OF THE SOUL.

Matt. xvi. 26. *What is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*

THE precepts of the Gospel oppose our natural inclination. They are also in many respects adverse to our worldly interests. The whole of Christianity is a system of self-denial. Hence none cordially embrace it till they have learned to take eternity into their estimate of present things. Our Lord therefore, having prescribed the line of duty to be regarded by all his followers (ver. 24.) and having urged the observance of it from the consideration of eternity, enforces it yet further by these pointed interrogatories; "What shall it profit," &c.

In order to elucidate the meaning of the text, we shall,

I. Institute a comparison between the things which are here set in competition with each other—

By "the world" we are to understand pleasure, riches, and honour^a—

This, if considered *in itself*, is vile—

[It is altogether earthly in its nature. It is utterly unsatisfying in its use. It is short and transitory in its continuance.]

If it be considered *as it has been estimated by the best judges*, it is worthless—

[Abraham, though opulent, left all to sojourn in a strange land^b. Moses relinquished the splendour of a court, to participate the lot of God's people^c. Solomon, after much experience, declared the world to be mere vanity^d. St. Paul counted those things as dung, which he once thought his gain^e. Christ himself despised the proffered titles of royalty^f. All true Christians resemble their Master in their contempt of the world^g.]

The "soul," on the contrary, if considered *in itself*, is noble—

^a 1 John ii. 15, 16,

^b Heb. xi. 8, 9.

^c Heb. xi. 24—26.

^d Eccl. i. 14.

^e Phil. iii. 8.

^f John vi. 15.

^g John xvii. 16.

[It is exalted in its origin^h, capacious in its powers, eternal in its duration; and it is doomed to everlasting happiness or misery. Already therefore its superior importance abundantly appears.]

Moreover, *as estimated by the best judges*, it is invaluable—

[Many have thought nothing too much to do or suffer for its welfareⁱ. But that which most stamps its value beyond all possible calculation, is, the gift of God's Son to die for it. Surely God would never have redeemed it at such a price, if it had not been of infinite value in his sight — — —]

Such being the disparity between the value of the world and that of the soul, we are prepared to,

II. See the result of the comparison—

We suppose, for argument sake, that a man may possess the whole world. We suppose also that, after having possessed it for a while, he loses his own soul. What in the issue “would he be profited?”

Let us inquire concerning this *in general*—

[Would *carnal* enjoyments compensate for the loss of *Heaven*? Would *transient* pleasures counterbalance an *eternity* of glory? Would he have any thing remaining to mitigate his pain?^k Would a momentary possession of the whole world be so high a gratification, that any reasonable man would be content to lose even his “animal life” for it^l? How much less could it be a sufficient price for the “soul!”]

Let us inquire also *more particularly*—

[The questions in the text are strong appeals to our hearts and consciences: they bid defiance, as it were, to all the arts of sophistry. Let the “lover of pleasure” then ask, what sensual gratifications, or vain amusements, will profit him? Let the “lover of this present evil world” ask, what will his honours and preferments profit him^m? Let the learned ask, what, even learning itself, the most excellent of all human attainments, will profit themⁿ?]

We conclude with suggesting some interesting subjects of self-examination—

^h Heb. xii. 9. God himself is “the Father of our Spirits,” without the intervention of any second cause.

ⁱ Acts xx. 24. Heb. xi. 35.

^k Luke xvi. 24.

^l $\Psi\upsilon\chi\eta$ —compare ver. 25. and 26. in the Greek.

^m Prov. xi. 4.

ⁿ Eccl. ii. 16.

[Which have I more regarded hitherto, the world, or my own soul? — — — Which do I intend in future to prefer? — — — What will be my thoughts respecting them in the day of judgment? — — — What answer shall I make to Christ, when he shall call me to account for despising that, for which he paid so great a price? — — — What would I not gladly give in exchange for my soul, if ever it should be lost through my present neglect? — — — And, if ever my soul should be saved, shall I not then account as dung all which I had lost in order to promote its salvation? — — — If these questions be duly weighed, we shall soon be like-minded with the great Apostle^o."]

° Phil. iii. 13, 14.

MCCCLXXVIII.

ELIJAH'S ADVENT IN JOHN BAPTIST.

Matt. xvii. 10—13. *And his Disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the Scribes that Elias must first come? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the Disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.*

IT is desirable that the evidences of our holy religion should be candidly examined, and clearly understood. The three favoured Disciples, Peter, James, and John, had just been admitted to behold a most extraordinary vision of their Lord in a state of transcendent glory, and had received from heaven this direct and audible testimony to his Messiahship, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him." They had seen, also, Moses and Elias on the holy mount with him, both of them in their embodied state, sent from heaven to converse with him on the subject of his future sufferings and glory^a. Now, it had been foretold that Elias, *i. e.* Elijah, should come as the forerunner of the Messiah^b; and an expectation of his arrival at that time very generally prevailed among the Jewish people. Yet the Disciples were

^a Luke ix. 30, 31.

^b Mal. iv. 5.

forbidden by their Lord to report what they had seen and heard, till all the other things which had been predicted respecting his death and resurrection should have been accomplished. The reasons of this prohibition the disciples could not comprehend; since, in effect, it prevented them from giving to the Jews a very strong testimony to the truth of their Master's divine mission. Hence they asked of their Lord an explanation of this matter: "Why, then, say the Scribes that Elias must first come," when we are not at liberty to attest his advent? Here was a real difficulty; and it is felt no less by the Jews at this day than it was at that time; it being with them a very principal objection against the Messiahship of Jesus, that Elias, who was foretold as his harbinger, has never yet arrived.

Let us then consider,

I. The difficulty proposed—

Nothing can be more clear than that, if Christ be the Messiah, every prophecy concerning him must be fulfilled—

[St. Peter, affirming that "he and his fellow-Apostles had not followed cunningly-devised fables," appeals to this very evidence which he and they had been favoured with, when, on Mount Tabor, they were made "eye-witnesses of Christ's Majesty, and heard from the excellent glory the voice which bare witness to him." But, aware that they might be suspected of having conspired together to propagate and maintain a falsehood in confirmation of some favourite system of their own, he appeals further to the "more sure word of prophecy," which never did, nor could, issue from men, (since it was delivered at such distant periods and places as to preclude a possibility of a conspiracy between the persons delivering the predictions,) but which proceeded entirely from the Holy Spirit of God, who, at many distant ages, stirred up and inspired holy men to speak the things which should afterwards, in due season, be brought to pass^c. And doubtless prophecy, taken in this view, is the strongest of all evidences, that the religion established by it, proceeds from God. On the other hand, if there were so much as a single prophecy unfulfilled, that one failure would be sufficient to subvert all the fabric that was built on ten thousand prophecies; since God cannot but fulfil his own word, "nor can so much as a jot or tittle of it ever fail" of its accom-

^c 2 Pet. i. 16—21. This I judge to be the true scope and meaning of this difficult passage.

plishment^d. Hence, when all things relating to our Lord's death had been fulfilled, except the offering of vinegar to him in his extremity, he said, "I thirst:" and then, after tasting of the vinegar, "he gave up the ghost^e." We may assume it, therefore, as an unquestionable truth, that "the Scripture cannot in any single instance be broken^f."]

But, in the instance before us, it seemed to the Apostles, as it does also to the Jews of the present day, that an important prophecy still needed to be accomplished—

[We wonder not that the Apostles were unable to account for the prohibition which they had received, and which seemed to disappoint the reasonable expectations of the Jews. Nor do I wonder that the Jews at this day lay a considerable stress on this, as invalidating the claims of Jesus to the Messiah's office. I grant them all that they can desire; and willingly concede to them, that if this difficulty cannot be removed, they are justified in rejecting the Lord Jesus, and in looking for a Messiah yet to come.]

But let us, for the removing of this difficulty, attend to,

II. The solution given of it—

Our Lord, in reply to his Disciples, acknowledged that Elias was certainly foretold as his harbinger, but affirmed that "he was already come," in the person of John the Baptist—

[John was born in a preternatural way, of parents who were at an advanced period of life. And the Angel who announced his formation in the womb declared, that "he should turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God; and *should go before him in the spirit and power of Elias*, to turn the hearts of the fathers to (with) the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; *to make ready a people prepared for the Lord^g*." Now *this distinctly applied to John the very prophecy on which the Jews founded their expectation of Elias^h*, and which our blessed Lord declares in my text to have been fulfilled in him.

Again: In John was fulfilled all that Elias was ordained to execute. He bore the most ample testimony to Christ, as "*the Son of God*," "in whom all were to believe," and who by his atoning blood should expiate the sins of the whole worldⁱ, and

^d Luke xvi. 17.

^e John xix. 28—30.

^f John x. 35.

^g Luke i. 13—17.

^h Mal. iv. 5, 6.

ⁱ John i. 29—34. with Acts xix. 4.

by his Spirit transform men into the image of their God, in righteousness and true holiness^k. Thus he fulfilled the office which God, by the Prophet Malachi, had assigned to the Forerunner of our Lord, "Behold, I send my Messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me;" and thus shewed himself a fit representative of that person whom the same prophet afterwards speaks of under the name and character of Elias^l.

To this it is objected, and a strong objection it appears, that John, when interrogated by the Priests and Levites whether he was Elias, *distinctly declared that he was not*^m; from whence it is said, and with great appearance of reason, that, supposing him to have been Elias, as our Lord affirms him to have been, he, by denying it, betrayed his office, and sanctioned the rejection of his Divine Master: but, as we cannot suppose that so good a man would have acted thus, we must believe what he says, and conclude, of course, that Elias is not yet come.

But it must be remembered, that the Jews expected *Elijah the Tishbite* to come, and inquired whether John were HE: consequently, John was right in denying himself to be *that identical person*: and the time for the fuller and more explicit development of this point was not yet arrived, their minds being not yet sufficiently prepared for it; as our Lord afterwards said, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them nowⁿ." But at this very time did John fully open his office as the Forerunner spoken of by the Prophet Isaiah; saying, "I am the voice crying in the wilderness: make straight the way of the Lord, as said the Prophet Isaiah^o." And, if this declaration of his be compared with the testimonies respecting him by the Prophet Malachi^p, he will be found to have given the *true answer* to the inquiry of the priests, and that which alone, at that time, they were able to receive.

If it be still objected, that because neither Elias *in person* came, nor did John ever *bear his name*, the prophecy has *therefore* not been fulfilled; I answer, that to speak of one person under the name of another whom he represents, is not uncommon, either in the Scriptures or in classic authors. Of the Jews, after their return to their own land, God says, "I will set up one Shepherd over them, even my servant David; and I will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them^q: yet was it never supposed by the Jews that David was to come again *in person* to reign over them in that day; but only, that their Messiah should come under the name of David, by whom he was typically represented. Let this be conceded,

^k Matt. iii. 11. These references in ^h, ⁱ, ^k, should be cited at length.

^l Mal. iii. 1. and iv. 5. ^m John i. 19—21 ⁿ John xvi. 12.

^o John i. 22, 23.

^p Mal. iii. 1. and iv. 5, 6.

^q Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24. xxxvii. 24, 25. and Hos. iii. 5.

as it must of necessity be; and the whole difficulty is solved at once: and we are prepared for that which we are next to contemplate,]

III. The inference to be deduced from it—

We say, then, without fear, that Jesus is the Christ, the Saviour of the world—

[To the testimony of John our Lord himself appealed^r: but “he had greater witness than that of John, even the works which he wrought^s,” and to these he appealed, for the satisfaction of the messengers whom John sent to him, to inquire whether he were the Christ^t. He acknowledged indeed, that, under existing circumstances, there was some difficulty in receiving John the Baptist as the representative of Elijah: “If ye will receive it, this is Elias which was for to come^u.” But that difficulty being removed, I will bear the same testimony to Christ as this Elias did: “He is the Son of the Living God,” even “Emmanuel, God with us^x.” “He is that Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world:” nor is there a person in the world whose iniquities, though red like crimson, shall not, when washed in his blood, become white as snow^y” — — — Moreover, if only we believe in him, “he will baptize us with the Holy Ghost and with fire,” even as he did the three thousand on the day of Pentecost. Beloved brethren, think of all that ye can need, for body or for soul, for time or for eternity; and assure yourselves that ye shall find it all in him: for there is “a fulness of it all treasured up in him;” and “out of that fulness shall ye all receive,” according to the utmost extent of your necessities or desires. Nor would I have you discouraged by the reception which this testimony receives from an ungodly world. “John Baptist’s testimony was rejected by the Scribes and Pharisees, who said, He had a devil^z,” yet was his testimony true. And the wise and mighty of this world may reject our testimony also: yet is it true; and it shall be found true ere long, to the grief and shame of those who reject it, and to the unutterable comfort of all who truly and cordially receive it. Our testimony, in few words, is this; “That God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son: he that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life^a.” And so far are we from wishing any one to receive it without inquiry, that we challenge inquiry from every living man; and pledge ourselves, that the more the evidences of this blessed truth are examined,

^r Matt. xxi. 25, 26.

^s John v. 33, 36.

^t Matt. xi. 2—6.

^u Matt. xi. 14.

^x Matt. i. 21—23.

^y Isai. i. 18. Zech. xiii. 1. 1 John i. 7.

^z Matt. xi. 18. Luke vii. 30.

^a 1 John v. 11, 12.

the more satisfactory will they be found; and that the more cordially the truth itself is embraced, the more influential will it become, for the comforting and sanctifying and saving of every believing soul.]

MCCCLXXIX.

CHRIST PAYING THE TRIBUTE MONEY.

Matt. xvii. 27. *Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take and give unto them for me and thee.*

THERE was nothing in the whole creation over which our Lord did not exert his sovereign authority. He not only overruled the spirits of men, but caused diseases and devils to flee at his command. The very beasts of the forest^a, and the fishes of the sea, were subject to his control, and yielded a ready obedience to his will. A most remarkable instance of his power over every living creature occurs in the passage before us. To elucidate it we shall,

I. Unfold the circumstances under which he wrought the miracle—

A certain tribute was about to be demanded of him—

[This tribute was half a shekel^b. It was originally to be paid by every one above the age of twenty, whensoever the people should be numbered. It was called the ransom money, and an atonement for their souls, because it was an acknowledgment to God, that their lives had been justly forfeited, and were spared merely through his sovereign mercy. More was not to be paid by the rich, nor less by the poor, because the lives and the souls of all are of equal value in the sight of God, and there is but one ransom-price for all. It was to be applied to the service of the tabernacle and temple, in which all classes of men were alike interested, and to the due support of which all should contribute^c]

From this, Jesus had a right to claim an exemption—

[It is usual for kings to exact tribute, not of their own children, but of their subjects, and of the foreigners who trade

^a Mark i. 13.

^b About fifteen pence of our money.

^c Exod. xxx. 12—16.

with them. Now Jesus was the Son of God, and the heir of all things: he therefore was not liable to pay the tax; and this right of exemption he stated to his servant Peter.]

But he waved his claim rather than give offence—

[Just as his claim really was, it was not likely to be acknowledged by the tax-gatherers. If insisted on, it might have given them occasion to represent him as indifferent to the temple service; and it might perhaps have been drawn into a precedent by those who were God's *adopted* children. He therefore chose rather to wave his right than by insisting on it to produce contention. He would “not give occasion to those who sought occasion against him,” “nor suffer his good to be evil spoken of.” He would not do even a lawful thing, if it might prove an occasion of offence^d.]

Not having money wherewith to answer the demand, he was constrained to supply his necessities by a miracle—

[In this miracle he discovered his *omniscience*. His all-penetrating eye beheld what was passing in the very depths of the sea: He knew that there was a fish, with one particular piece of money in its mouth; that it should be in the precise place where Peter should let down his hook; and that, coming to the hook, it should instantly be caught. What greater proof of omniscience could he give? And what in heaven or earth can be concealed from him, who discovered these things with such infallible certainty?

His *omnipotence* also was evinced by it. It is not to be conceived that such improbable things should occur, if they had not been accomplished by the secret agency of his overruling providence; nor would HE have risked the credit of his divine mission upon so trifling an incident, if he had not foreordained that it should exactly correspond with his predictions. Can any thing then be impossible to him, who could thus overrule the motions of a creature so distant from him, and apparently so independent of him? Surely no miracle whatever could more plainly evince his eternal power and godhead.]

From the miracle thus illustrated we may,

II. Found upon it some profitable advice—

1. Was the Lord Jesus thus poor? Let us learn contentment with our lot, however poor and afflicted it may be—

[The Lord's people are often most destitute and afflicted. But shall any one repine at poverty when he reflects on the

^d 1 Cor. viii. 13.

condition of our blessed Lord? Though he was Lord of all things, yet had he not a place where to lay his head, or a piece of silver to pay his tax. Let all then be satisfied with their lot, however humble. Let us not judge of God's love to us by the outward dispensations of his providence. Let us remember that, if God be our God, we are rich indeed, however poor our outward circumstances may be. The state of Lazarus was infinitely better than that of his rich ungodly neighbour. The true believer, though *visibly* he should "have nothing, yet in fact, possesses all things." In fact, if we look at the state of our blessed Lord, we shall see, that *the character most dignified on earth is that of a poor pious man*: and he who best sustains it, is most conformed to the image of God's only dear Son.]

2. Did Christ, to avoid giving offence, pay a tax, from which he was exempt? Let us not only pay cheerfully our just dues, but rather wave our strict rights, than, by rigorously insisting on them, give rise to clamour and contention—

[Our Lord submitted cheerfully to all the ordinances both of God and man; nor would he needlessly give offence by rigorously insisting even on his just rights. Alas! how different is the conduct of many who profess themselves his followers! *He* paid a tax which was not really due, rather than contend about it; whereas *they* clamour about the taxes which are legally due, and use every mean artifice to evade them. *He* paid notwithstanding he was constrained to work a miracle in order to gain the money, when he would have violated no law if he had withheld the tribute; while *they*, without any such urgent necessity, violate the most express commands of God, in refusing to "render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's," and to "pay tribute to whom tribute is due." More especially, did he act thus in order "that he might not give offence?" Let us avoid a contentious spirit; and, instead of joining in the clamour which ungodly men are ever raising against their governors, determine ever to be found among them that are "quiet in the land." We cannot doubt how Christ would conduct himself if he were now living amongst us: let it then be seen that we, all of us, "walk as he walked."]

3. Did he, under the pressure of want, supply the necessities of himself and Peter by a miracle? Let us trust in him for a supply of all our wants in the time of need—

[To what situation can any one be reduced, wherein Christ will not be able to discern and to supply his wants? Are we

embarrassed with *temporal* distresses? The Lord can multiply our barrel of meal, or send us fresh supplies by a raven or a fish; nor though his interposition should be less visible, shall it ever be withheld from those who ask it. He requires indeed that we should be diligent in our lawful calling; and it is usually *in this way* that he will (as he did on this occasion) send us relief. But the promise is sure to all, That, "if we seek him first, all needful things shall be added unto us." Are our difficulties of a *spiritual* nature? He is at no loss to succour and support us. He will surely strengthen us according to our day of trial, and shew himself a present help in the time of need. Let all then trust in him, and say with David, "The Lord is my shepherd, therefore shall I lack nothing." Let us remember that *he has paid our redemption money*: he has paid it at no less a price than his own blood. We may be sure, therefore, that he will give his Holy Spirit also to them that ask him, and *that* to the full extent of all our necessities.]

MCCCLXXX.

A LITTLE CHILD.

Matt. xviii. 1—4. *At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

DISPUTES of any kind among the children of God are most unbecoming their holy character, more especially when they originate in a competition for pre-eminence. Yet such is the depravity of our nature, that we are prone to affect superiority and distinction even after we have seen the vanity of earthly things. The Disciples of Christ, as well from their condition in the world as from the example set before their eyes, seemed least exposed to such a temptation; yet even they repeatedly manifested an ambitious desire of worldly honours. They had been disputing who among them should be the greatest in that earthly kingdom which they supposed their Master was about to establish. Our Lord, knowing all which had passed in their hearts, interrogated them with respect to the

subject of their conversation. But they, ashamed of it (as well they might be) held their peace. Finding however that all attempts to conceal it from him were in vain, they referred the matter to his decision. But their disingenuousness sadly appears, in that they propose the question to him only in a *general* way, as if they had felt no *personal* interest in it^a. Our Lord did decide it; but in a way they little expected. He exhibited before their eyes an emblem of true greatness, and shewed them,

I. The nature of conversion—

The conversion here spoken of means either a deliverance from that sin of which they were guilty, or a turning from sin in general^b. Taking it in the more enlarged sense, it imports the becoming like a little child,

1. In humility of mind—

[A little child is not filled with notions of his own greatness and self-sufficiency, but feels his dependence on others for support. Happy would it be for us if such were the habit of our minds towards God. But fallen nature is far removed from such a state as this. We universally think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, and imagine ourselves possessed of whatever is necessary for our salvation. But in conversion our views are greatly changed. We are brought to acknowledge our extreme guilt and helplessness, and are made willing to depend on Christ alone for righteousness and strength^c.]

2. In teachableness of disposition—

[Man in his natural state is as prone to lean to his own understanding as to trust in an arm of flesh. Almost every one thinks he knows his duty; nor do they who confess their need of human instruction, feel any want of the teachings of God's Spirit. But in this respect also their views are altered as soon as they partake of converting grace. As a little child is sensible of his ignorance, and ready to receive, without

^a Compare St. Mark's account, chap. ix. 33—35. with ver. 1. of the text.

^b Our Lord's words may be understood either as a particular admonition to *them*, or as a general declaration grounded on this particular occurrence.

^c See St. Paul's views of these things before and after his conversion, Rom. vii. 9. and Phil. iii. 6, 7.

gainsaying, the instructions given him, so the converted person, conscious that he knows nothing as he ought to know, desires to have the eyes of his understanding enlightened. He no longer disputes against the declarations of Scripture, but receives them implicitly, and looks up to God for that spiritual discernment whereby alone he can discover their truth and importance^d.]

3. In indifference to the world—

[The world is the idol which man in his unconverted state adores; its riches and honours are the great objects of his affection and pursuit. In this he is the very reverse of a little child. An infant has no solicitude about earthly distinctions: satisfied with the one object of his desire, he leaves others to contend for power and pre-eminence. Thus it is with the Christian that is truly converted to God. He has one great concern which occupies his mind, one great prize which he is seeking to obtain. Whether he have much or little of this world he judges to be a matter of little consequence. He does indeed covet riches and honour; but it is the honour that cometh of God, and the unsearchable riches of Christ: and excessive cares about earthly honours or wealth he leaves to those who have no inheritance beyond the grave^e.]

Having shewn his Disciples by this emblematical representation what conversion was, our Lord proceeded to declare,

II. The importance of it—

This he suggests in two different points of view:

1. Without such conversion no man can be partaker of the kingdom of grace on earth, or the kingdom of glory in heaven—

[Conversion is necessary before we can be truly admitted into *the kingdom of grace on earth*. We are indeed received into covenant with God in baptism; but it is regeneration that really makes us his children. We can never come to Christ as a Saviour, till we feel our need of him; we cannot learn of him, till we be willing to be taught; nor can we ever glorify him, till we be dead to the things of time and sense. The gate is too strait for us; the way of admission is too humiliating. The laws of his kingdom are such that our carnal minds neither will, nor can, obey them^f. Nor can we ever partake of his *kingdom of glory* unless we experience this change. What could we do in heaven even if we were admitted there? We should have no meetness for it, no dispositions suited to the enjoy-

^d Job xxxiv. 32. Ps. cxix. 18. ^e Gal. vi. 14. *δι' οὗ*, by *which*.

^f Rom. viii. 7.

ment of it. The glorified saints all cast their crowns before the feet of Jesus, and prostrate themselves in deep humility, ascribing all their salvation to him. How could we unite with them when we have never deigned to glorify him thus on earth? As for our worldly desires, what should we find to gratify them there? Heaven could be no heaven to us, if our affections were not set on the things that are there, and our employments suited to the exercises of that blessed state.]

2. In proportion as we experience such conversion will be our exaltation here and hereafter—

[Our Lord now plainly answers the question put to him. Let any one point out to us the person that most eminently resembles a little child, and we will immediately point out to him the greatest person in the world. It is not worldly grandeur that constitutes a person great, but moral excellence. "The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour," whatever other advantages his neighbour may possess. Even the ungodly cannot but admire those most, who are most truly humble. At the very time that they revile and persecute them, they reverence them in their hearts, and have a secret wish that they themselves were like them. And the godly invariably admire those most who are the greatest proficients in this grace. The exaltation of such persons *hereafter* will certainly also be proportionably great. Perhaps there is not one in heaven nearer the throne of God than he, who, when on earth, called himself "less than the least of all saints^g." Indeed God has repeatedly assured us that "he who humbleth himself shall be exalted."]

We may IMPROVE this subject,

1. For conviction—

[How few are there who truly resemble a little child! By the generality such a disposition would be considered as mean, abject, enthusiastic. But let it be remembered that it is absolutely necessary for the salvation of our souls. If a conversion from *one* particular sin was necessary in order to the salvation of the Apostles, notwithstanding all they had experienced, how much more must conversion be necessary for us, whose sins are so multiplied, and whose attainments are so small! Let us receive this declaration then as from the lips of him who shall judge the world. Let us apply to ourselves that solemn word, YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN^h. And let us instantly seek that change which is so difficult in its attainment, and so important in its consequences.]

2. For instruction in righteousness—

^g Eph. iii. 8.

^h John iii. 3, 5, 7.

[Have we been renewed in the spirit of our minds? Let us seek to be renewed more and more. The Apostles had forsaken all for Christ, and yet relapsed into the sin of worldliness and ambition. We never can become so childlike but that there may be room for farther advancement. Let the presence then of a little child be always a source of instruction to us. Let parents in particular, and all who have the care of children, learn from them; yea, let them never look upon a child without learning from him what they are to be in the hands of God. Let every one of us observe his simplicity of mind, and unity of desire; and let us regard him as a pattern for imitation. This was the very mind of Christ himself, who, being in the form of God, humbled himself, and took upon him the form of a servant. Let the same mind therefore be in us that was in him¹. "Seekest thou great things unto thyself? seek them not^k:" "Mind not high things, but condescend to low things¹." "Whosoever would become the greatest of all, let him make himself the least of all, and the servant of all."]

ⁱ Phil. ii. 5, 6. ^k Jer. xlv. 5. ¹ Rom. xii. 16. in the Greek.

MCCCLXXXI.

THE SECURITY OF GOD'S CHILDREN.

Matt. xviii. 14. *It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.*

OF all the images used in the Holy Scriptures for the representing of the Christian character, that of a little child is perhaps the most just and the most instructive. Its simplicity, its teachableness, its entire dependence on its parents for all things that are needful, render it a fit pattern for our imitation; so that our blessed Lord, when he would shew his Disciples the most exalted of all characters, "took a little child, and set him in the midst of them;" and declared, that the person who most resembled such a child was "the greatest in the kingdom of heaven^a." But, whilst the resemblance is to be traced chiefly in the dispositions of the mind, it will be found also in the utter incapacity of a child to protect itself, or to supply its own necessities. The state of God's children upon earth is one of great danger; insomuch, that they must of necessity perish, if he do not continually

^a ver. 4.

exert himself in their behalf. But, helpless as they are, it is the purpose and determination of God that not one of them shall ever perish. In confirmation of this truth, I will endeavour to set before you,

I. Their dangers—

All the Lord's people are exposed to many and great dangers;

1. From the corruption of their own hearts—

[They are by nature as depraved as other men, and as liable to commit every species of iniquity — — —]

2. From the temptations which beset them on every side—

[They have not a desire, to the gratification of which they will not find incentives, wherever they go — — —]

3. From the assaults of their great adversary, the devil—

[He is justly represented as a serpent for subtlety, and as a lion for strength: and his efforts to destroy them are incessant: "As a roaring lion, he goes about seeking whom he may devour." And who can understand his wiles, or be sufficiently on his guard against his devices? He has all the powers of darkness also confederate with him, for the destruction of the Lord's people. And who would be able to withstand him, if Almighty God himself did not stand forth for their help? If left to his assaults, not any child of man could ever be saved — — —]

4. From the pernicious influence of false brethren—

[To these, especial reference is made in the preceding context^b. "It must needs be that offences will come:" some dishonouring the Gospel by their unholy lives; and others departing from it altogether. The effect of such examples is pernicious in the extreme: and, inasmuch as they prevail in every age of the Church, every one will be more or less in danger of being drawn to abandon the faith which has been so dishonoured by them^c.]

But, in our text, we see,

II. Their security—

1. God regards them as his peculiar property—

[It is this consideration which induces a shepherd to go in search of a sheep that he has lost. If there be only one

^b ver. 7.

^c 2 Pet. ii. 2.

out of a hundred that goes from the fold, he will search and inquire till he find it. And to this he is stimulated by the consideration that it is his property^d. Now, God regards his "little ones" in this view. Even the lambs of the flock are not despised by him. "He has loved them with an everlasting love:" "he has chosen them in Christ before the foundation of the world;" and "predestinated them to the adoption of children," and set them apart to be a peculiar people for himself. Hence he feels a peculiar interest in them, and keeps his eye continually fixed upon them for good. He has given them from all eternity to his dear Son, to be his purchased possession: and they shall therefore be reserved as jewels to adorn his crown.]

2. He determines to preserve them even to the end—

[We are not to understand by the words of our text, that God has no ill design towards them; for he entertains not these against any child of man: "He willeth not the death of *any* sinner, but that *all* should come to repentance and live." But, in behalf of "those who believe in Christ" (for this is the description given of his little ones), he has a fixed purpose, that they shall not perish: "He keeps them by his power" for that very end, that they may not fall: and "he will never suffer any one to pluck them out of his hand".]

We must not however imagine that he will keep them without exertions of their own. No: it is *by* and *through* their own exertions that God will keep them. The Holy Spirit is said to "help our infirmities;" just as one man helpeth another, by bearing together with him a part of his burthen^f. And, if we will not exert the powers which God has given us, we shall in vain look for aid on his part. I consider this sentiment as peculiarly important: because many, from an apprehension that God's promised agency will generate supineness in us, discard altogether the idea that God has undertaken any thing for us. But God has assuredly engaged to "keep the feet of his saints," and to finish in them the work he has begun: but he will carry this into effect by calling forth our efforts to the uttermost. "His working in us to will and to do of his own good pleasure," is our encouragement to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling:" and, if we will not work for ourselves, we give a decided proof that the grace of God is not in us. If, on the other hand, we will "arise and work," we shall find that "God is with us of a truth," and that "our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."]

SEE, then,

^d ver. 12, 13.

^e John x. 28, 29.

^f συναντιλαμβάνεται.

1. What should be our minds towards “the little ones” of Christ’s flock—

[We should “not despise them,” either because they are his, or because they are but weak^g: still less should we put any obstructions in their way: for “it were better that a millstone were hanged about our neck, and that we were cast into the depth of the sea, than that we should offend one of his little ones^h.” We should rather be like-minded with God himself towards them, and afford them every aid in our power — — —]

2. How we ourselves may be of their happy number—

[We have before said, that they are described by our Lord as “believing in him.” If, with a sense of our lost and undone condition, we come to him, and seek acceptance through him, then may we be sure that we are his; especially if our faith approve itself as genuine, by its fruits. “Cleave, therefore, to him with full purpose of heart;” and rest assured that God will “keep you from falling, and present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.”]

^g ver. 10.

^h ver. 6.

MCCCLXXXII.

THE EFFICACY OF SOCIAL PRAYER.

Matt. xviii. 19, 20. *Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*

GOD has mercifully provided for the peace and welfare of his Church, by appointing, that disputes amongst his people shall be referred to arbitrators in the first instance, and, in the failure of that, to the decision of those who bear rule in the Church: and he has engaged to ratify in heaven the sentence which they shall pass on earth. This supposes, indeed, that they who are appointed to judge, are men of real piety and strict integrity; and that they implore from him that wisdom which is profitable to direct and regulate their judgment.

He has also provided for their welfare, by encouraging them, individually and collectively, to spread

their wants before him in prayer, assuring them, that they shall never apply to him in vain.

Let us consider,

I. The promise here given us—

A gracious answer to our prayers is here promised to us,

1. Individually—

[Supposing that two persons, feeling deeply in their own souls their spiritual wants, agree to spread those wants before God in prayer, and to implore help from him; our Lord assures them, that they shall obtain what they ask for, at the hands of a gracious God and Father. True indeed, each person asking for himself, is encouraged to expect from God a supply of all needful blessings: but a particular assurance is given where two persons unite in prayer; because, by the agreement which is entered into between them respecting the blessings they shall ask, there is *a more ample acknowledgment of God's power and grace* than is usually found in the petitions of a single individual, and at the same time *a more enlarged exercise of faith and hope*. Only conceive of them as agreeing respecting the extreme pressure of their wants, and the utter incapacity of any creature to relieve them—then, respecting the condescension and grace of God, who is both able and willing to supply all their need—and, lastly, as encouraging each other to expect from God the fulfilment of all his promises—and you will see immediately what reason there is for them to expect an answer to their united prayers, beyond what there would be to the petitions of a solitary individual.

Of course, the promise here given can relate only to those things which, when bestowed, will promote the best interests of the petitioners, and the honour of Almighty God. But with this only limitation, they may “open their mouths as wide as they will, and God will fill them.”]

2. Collectively—

[In the house of God we are to assemble “in the name of Jesus Christ;” that is, *in obedience to him as our Lord, and in dependence on him as our Saviour*. The whole Church ought, from time to time, to assemble for prayer: but, even if there be only two or three in number, they shall not on that account lose the blessings which they implore. God will honour the ordinances of his own appointment, and confer on his waiting people all the blessings which they stand in need of — — —]

Such is the promise of God to his Church and people: to estimate which aright, we should mark

II. The security we have for the performance of it—

The Lord Jesus assigns this as a ground of assurance to the suppliants: “It shall be done for them by my Father which is in heaven: FOR, where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” Now, as the Shechinah, the bright symbol of the Deity, was in the holy of holies, and answers to prayer were obtained by the high-priest from it; so is Jesus ever in his Church, to give an answer of peace to his suppliant and believing people.

It is here supposed, that, whether individually or collectively, the suppliants draw nigh to God “in the name of Jesus Christ”—

[There is no access to God, for any man, but through Him ——— nor any danger of repulse to “any man that comes unto God by him.” God has said, that “not one such person shall ever in any wise be cast out” ———]

Jesus Christ himself is already there, to secure to his believing people an answer to their prayers—

[He has said, “Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world^a.” And he is in the midst of them, *on purpose to bless them*^b.” He is expressly empowered by the Father to hear and answer their petitions. He has said, “Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, THAT WILL I DO, that the Father may be glorified in the Son^c.” See, then, what security this affords us that our petitions shall be heard. He came down from heaven for us: he assumed our nature, and died for us on the cross: he ascended to heaven to intercede for us: he had all fulness committed to him for us, on purpose that we might receive out of it according to our necessities. When, therefore, he hears us pleading the merit of his blood, and looking to him for the very blessings which he purchased for us, can we suppose that he will cast out our prayer? No: we may assure ourselves, that, as “he is in the midst” of his praying people, no prayer of theirs shall ever go forth in vain. Whether they be many or few, it shall make no difference with him: he will hear, and answer, and do for us “far beyond all that we can either ask or think” ———]

SEE, then,

1. With what pleasure we should attend the house of God—

^a Matt. xxviii. 20.

^b Exod. xx. 24.

^c John xiv. 13.

[Were it proclaimed abroad, that, at a certain time and place, all who would come should assuredly meet the Lord Jesus Christ, in the very body that he possessed on earth, no church in the universe would be large enough to contain one half of the people who would be assembled together. Yet, what would it be to see him with our bodily eyes, in comparison of seeing him by faith, as we do in his house of prayer? Dear brethren, those who beheld him in the flesh, were not near so highly privileged as you, who “behold the glory of God shining in his face” through every page of his blessed Gospel. O estimate your privileges aright; and you will account the ordinances of the Gospel precious beyond the powers of language to express.]

2. What improvement we should make of social converse—

[We should endeavour, not so much to *amuse*, as to *edify* our friends. Do but think what is here promised, that “if only two be agreed respecting what they shall ask, they may obtain it by their united supplications.” I almost wonder that, with our friends, we can find time to talk of any thing but our mutual wants, or to occupy ourselves in any thing but united supplications. At all events, we cannot but see what should be the daily habit of endeared friends, and especially of those who are united in wedded life. Dear brethren, know your privileges, and learn to make such an improvement of them as shall further and secure the eternal welfare of your souls.]

MCCCLXXXIII.

THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT.

Matt. xviii. 32—35. *Then his lord, after he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.*

MEN in general think themselves sufficiently instructed in morality; but, for the most part, their views of it are very partial and defective. The duty of forgiving injuries is universally acknowledged; but few are aware to what an extent it is required of them.

Peter, though a good man, needed much instruction on this head. He thought the limits he assigned to this principle were generous and ample; but our Lord rectified his judgment by an explicit declaration, and pointed out the grounds of his duty in an instructive parable.

From the words before us we are led to consider the *extent*, the *reasonableness*, and the *necessity*, of Christian forgiveness :

I. The extent—

[It does not forbid the execution of human laws, since magistrates are appointed of God on purpose to enforce them^a: nor does it prohibit the just exercise of authority in parents or masters. But it must extend to all offences, however numerous, however heinous^b— — — And proceed from a heart wholly divested of malice or resentment^c— — — We need not indeed restore to our favour one who *continues* unworthy of it^d; or forbear to punish him while he *continues* to merit our displeasure. But we must pity the offender while we punish the offence; and seek, in inflicting punishment, both his and the public good. We must feel towards him as an affectionate parent towards an offending child^e. We must feel disposed to pray for him, and to cover, rather than expose, his faults^f; and we must earnestly desire to behold in him such a disposition, as may open a way to perfect reconciliation with him.]

II. The reasonableness—

[Every man owes to God a debt that exceeds all calculation — — — Nor can the debt which any fellow-creature owes to us, bear any proportion to that which we owe to God^g. Yet we all hope to obtain of God a free remission and forgiveness; yea, provided we believe in Christ, our debt is already cancelled. Should not then a sense of mercy received, incline us to shew mercy? Should we “take a fellow-servant by the throat,” when the great Lord of all has spared us? Should we rigorously exact a few pence, when we have received a remission of ten thousand talents? It would be base indeed not to act towards an offending brother, as God has acted towards us, when we were enemies and rebels^h.]

^a Rom. xiii. 4.

^b “Seventy times seven.”

^c Prov. xxiv. 29.

^d Luke xvii. 3, 4.

^e “*From your hearts.*”

^f Prov. xxiv. 17, 18.

^g Ten thousand talents amount to above *four millions sterling*; whereas a hundred pence are somewhat less than *three guineas*, Doddr. in loc.

^h The Jubilee commenced on the day of atonement, to shew that

III. The necessity—

[There is an intimate connexion between the exercise of God's mercy to us, and ours to others. Though our forgiving of others cannot *merit* forgiveness from God, yet it will certainly be followed by it. On the other hand, an unmerciful disposition towards others will be the certain means of excluding us from God's favourⁱ. It will cut us off from the enjoyment of the mercy we *seemed* to have obtained^k. In uttering the Lord's prayer, we shall even seal our own condemnation^l. Let us then, if we desire to find mercy in the day of judgment, forgive others, as we hope to be forgiven^m.]

Let us LEARN from hence,

1. How to obtain forgiveness for our own offences—

[We must not merely ask for patience in hopes of discharging our own debt: we must rather acknowledge our inability to pay one single mite; and implore at God's hands a free and complete forgiveness. We must not however conclude from the parable, that there is no need of the mediation of Christ: it is through HIM alone that we can derive any blessings from God; but we must ask for mercy *as a gift*, instead of attempting to make any compensation for our own iniquities.]

2. How to obtain a forgiving temper towards others—

[If we know not what we ourselves merit at God's hands, we shall be ready to think much of any injuries which we receive from others; but if once we become sensible of the greatness of our debt to God, and of the obligations he has laid us under by the free offers of his mercy, we shall feel no difficulty in exercising forbearance and forgiveness. Resentment cannot long dwell in the bosom of one who has tasted redeeming love. Let it then be our study to obtain a thorough knowledge of our own depravity, and to imitate the long-suffering, which we ourselves so richly experience.]

men are then especially bound to exercise mercy, when they themselves have received mercy. Lev. xxv. 9.

ⁱ Matt. vi. 14, 15. Jam. ii. 13.

^k The parable must not be understood to say, that God revokes mercy, when he has once really pardoned us. See Rom. xi. 29. Heb. viii. 12.

^l Matt. vi. 12.

^m Col. iii. 12, 13.

MCCCLXXXIV.

THE LABOURERS.

Matt. xx. 6, 7. *And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.*

THERE is a manifest sovereignty observable in the dispensations of God's grace to man. His ways are often unsearchable to us, and even extremely contrary to our natural expectations. Moral persons are often left to perish in their sins, while the most immoral have been made illustrious monuments of divine mercy. And the richest rewards have in many instances been bestowed on those, who, according to human apprehensions, appeared the least likely to receive them. A moral and exemplary youth had deliberately renounced all hopes of an interest in Christ, that he might retain his worldly possessions^a. Our Lord, in his improvement of this event, declared that many, who, like him, seemed to be *first* in respect to spiritual advantages, would prove *last* in respect to the benefit derived from them. But none have any right to murmur against God, seeing that he may dispense his blessings as he will. To illustrate this truth our Lord delivered the parable before us^b.

The part of it just read, suggests to us many important observations :

- I. The Gospel provides for men a daily and laborious employment—

We need not speak of a Christian's work in general. We shall confine ourselves to the figure of a labourer in a vineyard—

[A labourer must first clear his ground from briars and noxious weeds; he must then dig up the earth, and endeavour to fertilize it with manure^c. After that he must carefully select his plants, and put them into the ground; he has then to water

^a Matt. xix. 21, 22.

^b Compare Matt. xix. 30. with xx. 16.

^c Luke xiii. 8.

them, and to prune the luxuriant branches^d; and finally, he must keep up the fences that nothing enter to destroy them^e. If the Christian's duties accord not with his in respect of order, yet they are the same in substance; he must root out of his soul all earthly, sensual, and devilish affections. If his open gross sins be not mortified, no heavenly plant can grow within him; he must dig deep into the recesses of his heart, and not be satisfied with a slight and superficial work. Without much meditation, and diligent self-examination, he can never know the desperate wickedness and deceitfulness of his own heart; nor must he expect fruit from the unimproved energy of the natural soil. He must get his soul ameliorated and enriched with the grace of God; he must apply to his Lord for plants of heavenly growth: above all he must be careful to possess "THE PLANT OF RENOWN^f." Without this, no other valuable plant will ever thrive^g; with this, humility, meekness, love, &c. will spring up, and flourish. Nor must he forget to water these plants with his prayers and tears. However fruitful he be, he will find reason enough to weep for his unfruitfulness; he will also find many luxuriant branches which require to be pruned. Lastly, he must remember that his adversary will be glad to spoil his labour; he must therefore fence every good desire with constant watchfulness^h. This, it must be confessed, is a difficult and laborious task. It cannot be performed without much diligence and self-denial: but he who prescribes the duty will assist us to perform itⁱ: and, as it is fit, he informs us of our work before he hires us into his service.]

Had the Gospel its full effect upon us, it would lead us to fulfil these duties as cheerfully as Adam wrought in cultivating the garden of Eden.

II. However long we may have been idle hitherto, it now calls us to begin our labour—

The parable in its primary sense relates to the Jews and Gentiles—

[The patriarchs, together with Moses, the prophets, John Baptist, and Christ himself, had sought in their successive ages to engage the Jews in their proper work. Thus the Jews had been called, as it were, at the third, sixth, and ninth hours.

^d John xv. 2.

^e Isai. v. 2—6. xxvii. 3.

^f Ezek. xxxiv. 29. This certainly refers to Christ. See ver. 23, 24, of that chapter.

^g "Christ must dwell in our hearts by faith." "Christ in us is the hope of glory." "Without him we can do nothing;" "through him, all things."

^h Eph. vi. 12, 16, 18.

ⁱ Rom. viii. 26.

The Gentiles, who had hitherto been overlooked, were now to be invited at the eleventh hour.]

But it may also be applied to individuals of every description—

[The occasion on which it was spoken relates equally to all^k; and persons of different ages or circumstances may fitly represent the different hours. Some, like Samuel and Timothy, enter into the service of their God in very early life¹: happy indeed are they; and thankful should they be for the grace that inclined their hearts. Others have attained a considerable age before they begin their appointed work. What reason have they to bless God for having subdued their reluctant spirits! But many are now arrived at “the eleventh hour.” All who are far advanced in life are certainly of this description; they too, who are weak and sickly, are probably drawing to the close of their day: yea, there may be some whose day of grace is nearly terminated, while they are yet in full vigour both of body and mind. Surely all such persons may well conceive themselves to be addressed in the text.]

To us then is the invitation of the Gospel now sent—

[The Saviour’s voice to every one of us is, “Go into my vineyard.” He justly expostulates with us, “Why stand ye here all the day idle?” Nor can any of us offer that excuse that might be justly urged by the Gentiles. We have received numberless calls to enter into the service of our God^m. If we delay therefore any longer we shall be utterly without excuse. We know indeed that they, who dislike God’s service, will find pleas enough for declining itⁿ. But have we provided an excuse that will be accepted in the day of judgment? If so, we may go on securely in our career of sin: but if not, let us not, by hardening our hearts, provoke God finally to exclude us^o. It is in vain to urge, that we are incapable of performing the work assigned us. To the weakest person upon earth God will assuredly fulfil that promise^p— If indeed we attempt to serve him in our own strength, we must expect to fail; nor, if we only engage *occasionally* in his work, can we hope to succeed. Every intermission renders our task so much the more difficult. A vineyard long neglected will afford more trouble to the

^k Matt. xix. 29.

¹ The hours are reckoned from six in the morning, that is, from sun-rise to sun-set; so that the third hour is early in the day.

^m Rom. x. 21.

ⁿ ‘I must attend to my worldly business; I have a family to provide for,’ &c.

^o Heb. iii. 7—11.

^p Deut. xxxiii. 25.

labourer; but if we *regularly* persevere in duty, our labour will be light and easy^a. Let us then be thankful that the invitation is sent us at this late hour; and let the account once given of the Jews now be realized amongst us^r—]

That this invitation may not be slighted as others have been, we observe,

III. To every one that will labour in earnest, the Gospel promises a suitable reward—

We must not suppose that the same reward will be given to all persons—

[The Jews had borne the burthen of the ceremonial law; and the Gentiles, though delivered from that yoke, are made fully equal with them. This is the circumstance referred to in the parable, and which so offended the Jews^s. But to us there will be given a recompence according to our works^t. Not that the reward will be bestowed for any *merit* that is in us^u. The happiness of heaven will be altogether the gift of God for Christ's sake^x: nevertheless God of his infinite goodness will reward us *in proportion to our labour*^v.]

To every one will be given “whatsoever is right,” and equitable—

[If none shall have room to boast, so none shall have reason to repine. The lowest degrees of happiness shall infinitely exceed any thing we could claim. Every vessel too shall be full; though all have not the same dimensions. The word of God is pledged that not the smallest service shall be unrewarded^z. We may rest assured therefore that we shall find his promise true^a.]

ADDRESS—

1. To loiterers—

[What readiness would you not shew if a great *earthly* recompence were tendered you! And will you draw back when all the glory of heaven is offered you? Would the devils and damned spirits regard the overtures of mercy as you have done? O think, how soon “the night is coming in which no man can work!” Think, how awful will be the doom of the wicked and slothful servant! and instantly begin the Lord's work, that you may at last receive his wages.]

2. To labourers—

^a Matt. xi. 30.

^r Luke xvi. 16.

^s ver. 11, 15.

^t 2 Cor. v. 10.

^u Rom. iii. 27. iv. 4, 5. and xi. 6.

^x Rom. vi. 23.

^v 1 Cor. iii. 8.

^z 1 Cor. xv. 58. Matt. x. 42.

^a Prov. xi. 18.

[Ye serve the best of masters, and have the most honourable of all employments. Doubtless ye see but too much reason to lament your unprofitableness. But God is not extreme to mark what is omitted or done amiss. If ye really make it “your meat to do his will,” be of good cheer; the evening, when your labours will end, is fast approaching: then shall you be called into the presence of your Lord and Master; nor shall the least or most unworthy of you all be overlooked by him. Be not weary then of well-doing, for you shall all reap in due season^b. To every one of you shall those delightful words be addressed^c —]

^b Gal. vi. 9.

^c Matt. xxv. 21.

MCCCLXXXV.

CHILDREN VINDICATED.

Matt. xxi. 16. *Have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?*

THE wisdom of our Lord was very conspicuous in the answers he returned to cavillers. He was thoroughly conversant with every part of the sacred writings; and to them he appealed on every occasion. In his conflicts with Satan, he invariably had recourse to them^a: and when assaulted by men, he fought with no weapon which was not brought from that divine arsenal^b: and every passage which he adduced was as an arrow from a well-directed bow. This is well exemplified in the words before us.

Our Lord had just driven the traders and money-changers out of the temple; and had healed multitudes of persons, who flocked around him for a cure. The children that were present, being struck with wonder both at his authority and benevolence, surrounded him with acclamations and hosannahs, and welcomed him as the Messiah promised to their nation. The chief priests and scribes, on the contrary, were filled with indignation; and remonstrated with our Lord, for suffering them to express such sentiments in his hearing: “Hearest thou what these

^a Matt. iv. 4, 7, 10.

^b Compare Matt. xxvi. 51—54. with John v. 39.

say?" 'It is a disgrace to thee to be pleased with the acclamations of weak, silly children; or of an ignorant and infatuated mob^c.' Yes, these, who should have been the foremost to encourage early piety, were the very first to repress it. But our Lord repelled their objection by an unanswerable appeal to Scripture: "Have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise^d?"

Now, from these words I shall take occasion to shew,

I. That the Scriptures are the standard by which every thing must be tried—

[By them must all our sentiments be formed, and all our conduct regulated. The Apostles continually, in support of their doctrines, refer to them. It is a frequent expression of St. Paul, "But what saith the Scripture?" And to that must our appeal also be made, on every occasion. Then, if our views or actions be blamed, we have at least a rule whereby they may be judged: and if they be in accordance with that rule, we need feel no concern, even though they be condemned by the whole world. There are in the Christian system, and in the Christian life too, many things which, by an ungodly world, are accounted foolishness; and we must expect that those things will be disapproved in us. But, when blamed on account of those things, we should mildly reply, 'Have ye never read such or such declarations in Holy Writ? You think my views of man's fall are too gloomy: but have ye never read, "The carnal mind is enmity with God?"' You think that I carry my religious zeal too far: but have you never read, "The love of Christ constraineth us to live to Him who died for us, and rose again?"' Thus always bring both yourselves and others to the Scriptures, as the only test of truth: for so hath God directed us: "To the word and to the testimony: if men speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them^e."]

In this way you will be able to shew,

^c The word *παῖδες* may probably mean servants and followers, rather than mere children.

^d The words used by David are, "Thou hast ordained strength." See Ps. viii. 2. But our Lord quoted, as the Apostles after him frequently did, from the Septuagint Translation, and not from the Hebrew. The meaning, however, is the same in both: God *manifests his strength*, and *glorifies his name*, in using weak instruments to effect his purposes.

^e Isai. viii. 20.

II. That devotion, by whomsoever condemned, will be found conformable to that standard—

[The hosannahs of the children were most probably regarded as the effusions of weak and uninformed minds. And this is the construction which is still put on the conduct of those who endeavour to exalt the Saviour, and who are, on this account, derided as enthusiasts. But look into the Scripture, and see the state of David's mind. Can any one read the Psalms, and not wish to be in the same frame of mind with him, when he said, "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me bless his holy name?" In the New Testament it is written, "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice." In fact, there should not be an hour in the day, in which our souls should not be tuned for praise. And though we are not called to express our admiration and love in the same public manner as the children in the temple were, there should be in us the same disposition; yes, and in our secret chamber, too, the same exercise of it as we have seen in them. Nor, if a public testimony of our love to the Saviour be called for, should we be either ashamed or afraid to give it. It is by praise that God is glorified^f. In heaven, the saints and angels have no other employment: and it is our privilege, and duty too, to begin our heaven upon earth.]

For your comfort, also, will you find,

III. That the weaker the instruments by whom his glory is advanced, the more is God glorified—

[We should have been ready to think that the praises of the Chief Priests would have been more to the honour of our blessed Lord: and at this time we are apt to imagine that the services of the rich and learned more exalt God than those of the poor and ignorant. But the very reverse of this is more consistent with truth. For, if the wise and noble were most forward to honour the Saviour, we should impute their conduct to natural principles: we should conclude that reason and education were the chief means of their conversion. But, when we see babes and sucklings well instructed in the things that are hid from the wise and prudent, we are constrained to ascribe the effect to grace alone^g. Let none, therefore, think that they are incapable of glorifying God; or that "God will despise the day of small things:" for the prayer of the Publican and the mite of the widow were more acceptable to God than many longer prayers and richer offerings: and if only we "serve God with what we have, it shall be accepted of him^h." Four times does God tell his poorer worshippers to serve him

^f Ps. l. 23.

^g Matt. xi. 25, 26.

^h 2 Cor. viii. 12.

with “*such as they can get*.” In truth, “the weaker we are in ourselves, the more is his strength perfected in our weakness^k.”]

APPLICATION—

1. Let parents labour to bring their children to Christ—

[Parents are apt to neglect their children, under an idea that their minds are not sufficiently expanded to receive divine knowledge. But we read of many who were sanctified from their earliest infancy^l: and the instance before us is sufficient to encourage our most laborious exertions^m — — — Happy the parents of such children as those! and happy the children whose earliest years are thus devoted to the Lord! Let religious parents, in particular, look to it, that they spare no pains in instructing their children, and praying both *with them* and *for them*: for so has God commandedⁿ: and they have his promise, that in due season he will prosper their efforts^o.]

2. Let us, who are instructed in the Gospel, abound in praises to our blessed Lord—

[Those children had to oppose the example and authority of the Priests; and, of course, were very imperfectly acquainted with the character of our Lord and Saviour: yet they praised and adored him with all their power. But we see Jesus as our incarnate God: we know the true end of his death as an atonement for our sins: we behold him risen, and exalted to the right hand of God, and ever living to make intercession for us. We, too, are urged by all possible motives to serve and glorify him. How culpable, then, shall *we* be, if we neglect to honour him! and how will those children rise up in judgment against us, to condemn us, if we do not glorify him before the whole world! I call on all of you, then, to get your minds impressed with the glory and excellency of your Saviour; and from henceforth, both in public and in private, to adore and magnify him with your most grateful acclamations.]

ⁱ Lev. xiv. 21, 30—32.

^k 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^l Samuel, Abijah, Josiah, Timothy, John the Baptist.

^m Here shew the importance of the Institution of *Sunday*, or *Infant*, or *Charity* Schools.

ⁿ Eph. vi. 4.

^o Prov. xxii. 6.

MCCCLXXXVI.

THE FIG-TREE CURSED.

Matt. xxi. 18—22. *Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered. And when he saw a fig-tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves*

only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig-tree withered away. And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig-tree withered away! Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig-tree, but also, if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

THE miracles wrought by our Lord were, for the most part, very different from those which had been performed by the great legislator of the Jews. Those by which Moses confirmed his divine mission were mostly awful and calamitous; but those wrought in vindication of our Lord's authority, were all mild and benevolent, suited to the dispensation which he was sent to introduce. This, which we have now before us, may seem an exception^a. Yet the injury done (if we may so speak) was small, since the tree was already barren; and the miracle, if it had been duly attended to, might have saved thousands from both temporal and everlasting destruction. We shall,

I. Explain the miracle—

There is some difficulty with respect to the *literal* meaning of a part of this narration—

[The miracle, as related by St. Matthew, is easy to be understood; but St. Mark mentions, that “the time of figs was not yet^b.” This has given occasion to infidels to represent our Lord as looking for figs at a season when, according to the Evangelist's own confession, there was no probability of finding any. But “the time of figs” refers to the time of *gathering* them; and as *that* time was not yet fully come, there was every reason to expect that the whole crop was yet upon the tree. The fruit of a fig-tree grows at least as early as the leaves; and therefore, as the foliage was luxuriant, there was ground to hope that the fruit also was abundant. This accounts in an easy manner for the disappointment experienced by our Lord; and shews how weak and frivolous

^a *That* of sending the devils into the herd of swine was rather a *permission* to them to fulfil their own desire, than an actual miracle wrought by our Lord himself.

^b Mark xi. 13.

are the objections urged by infidels against the truth of our holy religion^c.]

Respecting the *prophetical* meaning of the miracle all are agreed—

[The Jews had enjoyed every advantage of care and culture; yet they constantly disappointed the expectations of their God. They professed themselves indeed to be his peculiar people; but they brought forth no fruit that was suited to that relation. Now therefore God had determined to abandon them to *judicial impenitence*, and *utter desolation*. The speedy effect, which followed from our Lord's denunciation against the fig-tree, intimated the near approach both of the *spiritual* and *temporal* judgments which were coming on the Jews. And the event answered the prediction. It was but *four* days before they filled up the measure of their iniquities by crucifying the Lord of glory; and but forty years before the temple and city were finally destroyed. Thus was the fig-tree made a warning to the Jewish nation; and a salutary emblem would it have been, if they had regarded it as they ought.]

Having explained all which is necessary to a just understanding of the miracle, we shall,

II. Consider the declarations founded upon it—

The former of these relates to his own more immediate disciples—

[Being now soon to leave the world, our Lord was studious to support and comfort his disciples. And the surprise which they expressed at the speedy destruction of the fig-tree, too clearly manifested their low thoughts of his power, and consequently their need of having their faith in him increased. On this account, as it should seem, he made a less obvious improvement of the miracle than he might otherwise have done; and turned that into a ground of comfort, which would more naturally have afforded an occasion of solemn admonition. The disciples, like himself, were to work miracles in confirmation of their word; and greater works than this were to be performed by them. He tells them therefore to exercise faith in God, and to proceed to the performing of the greatest miracles with the most assured confidence, that the effects

^c If the words, "*And when he came to it he found nothing but leaves*," Mark xi. 13. be included in a parenthesis, the sense of the whole will appear at once. The very same writer has expressed himself on another occasion *precisely in a similar manner*, chap. xvi. 3, 4. Inclose the former part of ver. 4. in a parenthesis, and the true meaning of the passage becomes obvious.

predicted by them should instantly and infallibly be produced. Thus he prepared them for their future ministrations, and encouraged them to rely on the invisible agency of an Almighty God.]

The latter may be understood in reference to the Church at large—

[This indeed, like the former, *may* be taken in a limited sense: but it may also be applied to the great body of believers. It accords with many other passages that confessedly relate to all^d. And what encouragement does it, in this view, afford us! We need never despond on account of any difficulties. Not even mountains of guilt and corruption should cause us to say, There is no hope. The prayer of faith shall bring Omnipotence to our aid. Nor is there any thing promised in the sacred oracles which shall not be given to the believing suppliant. The same almighty power that blasted the fig-tree, shall blast our enemies, and cause, if need be, the very mountains to start from their bases, and be buried in the sea.]

From hence we may LEARN,

1. The danger of a fruitless profession—

[God expects his people to be fruitful in good works. Nor will he acknowledge us as his if we disappoint his expectations. Let us not then be satisfied with the fairest leaves of profession, without bringing forth the fruits of righteousness to his praise and glory. Jesus is assuredly coming soon to inspect us all. He hungers, as it were, after our good fruits. Let us then study to bring forth such, that “our Beloved may come into his garden and eat with pleasure^e.” And let us dread lest we provoke him to *make our sin our punishment*, and lest, being “filled with our own ways^f,” our “nakedness appear unto all.”]

2. The true source of all our fruitfulness—

[Jesus, in cursing the fig-tree, had nothing to do but to withhold his blessing from it; and instantly it was withered both in root and branch. Its power even to bring forth leaves had been derived from him. Thus, if his Spirit be taken from us, we shall become “twice dead, plucked up by the roots^g.” To him then we must give the glory of all the good that we have been enabled to do; for, “of him has our fruit been found^h,” and “by his grace alone we are what we are.” “We have nothing which we have not received.” And to him must we look for strength to fulfil his will in future; for, “All our fresh springs are in himⁱ.”]

^d John xiv. 13, 14.

^e Cant. iv. 16.

^f Prov. xiv. 14.

^g Jude, ver. 12.

^h Hos. xiv. 8.

ⁱ Ps. xxxvi. 9. and lxxxvii. 7.

3. What exalted thoughts we should entertain of Christ's power—

[This was the peculiar improvement which our Lord himself made of his miracle. And alas! what need have we to be continually reminded on this subject! At every fresh difficulty we are ready to be discouraged, as though He were not able to deliver. And doubtless our unbelief often prevents him from exhibiting his wonders to our view^k. Has he not said that, If we believe, we shall see the glory of God^l? Let us then be "strong in faith, giving glory to God." Let us never limit the power and grace of Christ, but with unshaken affiance follow the direction he has given us, "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and beside me there is none else."]

^k Matt. xiii. 58.

^l John xi. 40.

MCCCLXXXVII.

THE TWO SONS.

Matt. xxi. 28—31. *But what think ye? A certain man had two sons: and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not; but afterwards he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, Sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.*

INVETERATE prejudice is scarcely ever to be overcome by the plainest arguments. There is no action, however praiseworthy, which it will not condemn; nor any reasoning, however conclusive, which it will not obstinately resist. The best way to conquer it is by secret and indirect attacks. This method our Lord frequently adopted, when every other had been tried in vain. The Pharisees, unconvinced by all our Lord's miracles, demanded by what authority he had presumed to purge the temple. Our Lord offered to satisfy their demand, if they would first inform him from whence John had derived his authority to administer baptism. They, aware of the drift of his question, and that in replying to it they must

condemn themselves, declined giving him any direct answer. Our Lord, seeing their perverseness, changed his mode of dealing with them, and drew from them an involuntary acknowledgment of their guilt, by means of a less obvious, but well-adjusted, parable.

In opening the parable we shall,

I. Compare the conduct of the two sons—

The first of them represented the state of those to whom John had preached—

[His father ordered him to “go and work in his vineyard.” This command he peremptorily refused to comply with; but, on further consideration, “repented” of his misconduct, “and went.” Thus many of the Baptist’s hearers were of an abandoned character: they, by their lives, had shewed an utter contempt for the will of God; but they were soon brought to a sense of their undone condition: they thankfully embraced the mercy which that faithful preacher announced to them, and submitted to his baptism in token of their unfeigned contrition.]

The second represented the Pharisees whom our Lord was addressing—

[He promised a ready and unreserved obedience to his father’s will, but never truly engaged in executing the work assigned him. Thus the Pharisees professed much reverence and respect for God: they wished to be thought his dutiful and obedient children, but they would not really devote themselves to his service: what might suit their own inclination and redound to their own credit, they would do; but they would not enter into the vineyard which he required them to cultivate; they would not submit to the humiliating doctrines which John had preached, nor accept that salvation which was offered them by Christ himself^a—]

Both of them are just emblems of many living characters—

[There are many who have lived in the violation of all God’s commands: the constant language of their hearts has been that of rebellion against him^b: but, by the grace of God, they have been convinced of their sin; they have deeply bewailed all their former iniquities; they have sought for mercy

^a John vii. 37, 38, 48. There may be a further reference in the text to the rejection of the Gospel by the hypocritical Jews, and the reception of it among the idolatrous Gentiles.

^b Ps. xii. 4.

through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, and have shewn the truth of their repentance by the renovation of their lives. Others there are, who have been sober and moral in their conduct: they profess to respect all the commands of their heavenly Father: but they rest in "the form, while destitute of the power of godliness;" they neglect the duties of "repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus;" they will not be prevailed on to look to "Christ for all their righteousness and strength;" in short, "they are whole, and see no need of a physician:" hence, though amiable in themselves, they are "enemies of the cross of Christ."]

On a comparison of the two, the latter appears decidedly the better character—

[*The former* manifested indeed at first the greatest impiety, and might justly have been dismissed for ever from his father's house: but his subsequent repentance altogether altered his character; and his obedience arising from it proved him to have attained a becoming sense of his duty. On the other hand, *the latter* was "an hypocrite in heart:" his fair promises only added to the guilt of his disobedience, and his continued violation of them constituted him a most worthless character. Our Lord referred it to the Pharisees themselves to decide their comparative merits; they instantly gave their testimony in favour of the former: nor could prejudice itself withhold its assent in so clear a case.]

Having determined this point, we shall proceed, in imitation of our Lord, to,

II. Make some observations resulting from that comparison—

The Pharisees did not immediately see for what end our Lord put to them that question—

But, by their answer to that, many important TRUTHS are established:

1. It is not always the most specious character that is most likely to go to heaven—

[Far be it from us to plead for wickedness of any kind. It is certainly better to be moral and sober, than immoral and profane. It is better to be a decent Pharisee than to be numbered with "publicans and harlots:" but it is no less certain that moral persons are apt to pride themselves in their virtue; they cannot endure to be told that they deserve the Divine displeasure; and, that they must be as much indebted to divine grace as the very vilest of mankind; they think they may place some dependence at least on their own works; nor

will they submit to the painful necessity of making "Christ their all." But more notorious sinners are more easily convinced of sin; they see at once that they can have no righteousness of their own; and, when humbled for their iniquities, gladly embrace the Gospel salvation. Thus it was with the different hearers of John the Baptist^c; and thus it was in the apostolic, and all succeeding ages^d. Let us then endeavour to bear in mind that caution of Solomon^e—and thankfully accept mercy on the terms offered to us in the Gospel—.]

2. The characters of men will not be determined by their words, but by their actions—

[In some sense indeed, it is true, that "by our words we shall be condemned or justified^f:" but God will not be deceived by any fair promises or transient intentions. We may say, 'I go, Sir;' but he will inquire, whether we really go; nor will he regard our professions of love and service, if in works we deny him. It is the penitent and obedient, not the hypocritical and deceitful, son, that he will accept. Let none then rest in confessions of faith or promises of obedience. Let every one inquire, 'Am I now working for God in his appointed way?' Let us not ask, 'Am I doing as much as others?' but '*What do I more than others? Am I more humble, more meek, more dead to the world, more exercised in spiritual things, &c.?*' This is the test by which God will judge us in the last day. Let us then try ourselves by this rule, that we may know our true character; nor let us think ourselves right because we once appeared earnest in doing the Lord's will. Let us remember the plain declarations of God concerning us^g; and let us expect reward or punishment according to the verdict of his word and of our own conscience^h.]

3. The most daring rebel, if he truly repent, shall be accepted of God—

[This is a most delightful and encouraging truth to a sincere penitent. It is ascertained beyond a doubt from the parable before us: it has been exemplified in numberless, and authentic, instancesⁱ: and it shall be realized at this hour to those who truly desire it. However open, heinous, or deliberate our offences have been, they shall be forgiven^k. The vineyard is yet open, and the command of God is, Go work in it. Let publicans and harlots hear the voice of our common Father: let them be assured, that their past iniquities shall be

^c Luke vii. 29, 30. and Matt. xxi. 32.

^d Rom. ix. 30—32.

^e Prov. xxx. 12.

^f Matt. xii. 37.

^g Matt. vii. 21. Ezek. xviii. 21, 22, 24.

^h 1 John iii. 20, 21.

ⁱ Manasseh, 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12, 13. Luke vii. 47.

^k Isai. i. 18.

no more remembered¹; and that every thing they do for God shall be accepted of him. If only they believe in Christ, and engage in his service, they need not fear. While unbelieving Pharisees shall be cast out, they shall find favour in God's sight. O that these blessed tidings may be welcomed as they deserve to be! Let not any say, To-morrow I will regard my Father's command. His voice to every one is, Go, work TO-DAY in my vineyard. None of us can tell what may be on the morrow. Let none then presume to defer this necessary work. God himself most solemnly cautions us against delay^m. To every one of you therefore do we address the Apostle's exhortationⁿ— and we pray God that ye may not only say, Lord, Lord! but do his will.]

¹ Heb. viii. 12.^m Heb. iii. 13, 15.ⁿ 2 Cor. vi. 2.

MCCCLXXXVIII.

THE MARRIAGE FEAST.

Matt. xxii. 2, 3. *The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come.*

INSTRUCTION and reproof generally irritate those who will not be reformed; but ministers must “speak plainly, whether men will hear or forbear.” They must present the same truths in various shapes, if by any means they may win the souls of their hearers; nor should they be intimidated even by the most imminent dangers. Jesus had spoken a parable that greatly offended the Pharisees: they even sought to take away his life on account of it: but he still persisted in his benevolent labours for their good, and repeated the same offensive truths in the parable before us. In the parable he compares the kingdom of heaven, or the Gospel dispensation, to a king who made a marriage for his son, and sent his servants to invite guests to the marriage-feast. This king was Jehovah: the wedding was between the Lord Jesus Christ, God's only-begotten Son, and his spouse the Church: and the feast instituted in honour of it, contained all the blessings of grace and glory. The Prophets and Apostles were sent forth in Jehovah's

name to invite all the Jews to a participation of this feast: but their message was despised and their persons injured; so that God would now cease any more to call the Jews, and would send forth his invitations to the Gentiles, whom he would receive with all imaginable kindness, whilst he left the Jews to eat the bitter fruit of their folly.

Now, as we are the favoured people to whom these invitations are sent, I will more distinctly open to you the parable in its different parts, and then execute the commission which is here assigned me.

The union of Christ with his Church is often spoken of in the Scriptures under the figure of a marriage—

[By nature we are in the most deplorable condition. But he of his own sovereign grace sets his heart upon us, and prepares us for himself, and unites us to himself in the closest bonds^a. The espousals take place now in this world^b; the consummation will be in the world to come^c.]

In honour of this marriage God institutes a feast—

[But who shall declare how rich this feast is? Truly it is a feast worthy of God, the God of heaven, to provide, and worthy of his most favoured creatures to partake of in the heavenly world. Already, whatever can conduce to the enlightening of the mind, the rectifying of the will, the purifying of the affections, the strengthening, establishing, and comforting of the soul, is dispensed to us as a foretaste of that divine banquet. The love of the Father, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, are imparted to us in the richest abundance. Wine and strong meat are ministered to adults, and milk to the new-born babes, insomuch that there is not a person in the universe who may not find that very food which he most affects, and which his necessities more particularly require.]

And now are his servants sent forth to invite us all—

[As Prophets and Apostles were sent forth in former ages so are ministers appointed now to this very service, to call to the wedding all who have a wish to come; saying, "Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely." This, brethren, has been my happy office, which I have most gladly performed from the first instant that I came amongst you. I have not set forth the Gospel as a work to be performed, or a labour to be sustained, but as a

^a Ezek. xvi. 4—12.

^b Jer. ii. 2. 2 Cor. xi. 2.

^c Rom. xix. 7.

feast to be enjoyed, “a feast of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined^d,” “to satiate every weary soul, and to replenish and exhilarate every sorrowful soul^e.” In calling you to be guests, we require of you no pre-requisites of goodness and worthiness for the meriting of this distinction: it is offered even to the very chief of sinners, provided they be willing to accept of mercy and all the other blessings of salvation as the free gift of God in Christ Jesus. All is offered to you freely “without money and without price.”]

But what reception has our message met with in the midst of you?

[Some, I am happy to say, have accepted the invitation, and are already partaking of the feast — — — But the generality amongst you have acted, as those in former days, who “made light of” the proffered mercy, and “went to their farm and merchandize” as an employment better suited to their taste. Some, like the Jews in former ages, have evil-entreated the servants of the Lord^f. Others, who have treated the *messengers* with more respect, have yet shewn the same indifference to the message, satisfying themselves with vain excuses, which nevertheless they must know can never satisfy their God^g — — — Almost all desire to put off the day of their intercourse with the heavenly Bridegroom, as though it were rather an evil to be dreaded, than a feast to be enjoyed. If the listening to our invitation would suffice, they would be contented to go thus far on the Sabbath-day: but if they must come to Christ and sit down with him at the wedding-feast, they desire to postpone it to some more convenient season, when the cares and pleasures of life shall have lost all their attraction.]

And what must be the issue of such conduct?

[Those who have reviled and persecuted the servants of the Most High, will meet with a suitable recompence at his hands^h. And those who have “made light of” their labour, will never be admitted “so much as to taste of this supperⁱ.” It is a fact that they who come not now to this feast, know nothing of God’s pardoning love, nothing of the comforts of the Holy Ghost. They are utter strangers to all spiritual joy. They think all experience of heavenly communications, all manifestations of God’s love, and all foretastes of his glory, to be no better than the dreams of a heated imagination. What hope then can they have that they shall possess all the fulness of these blessings in the eternal world? In their present condition they have no capacity for the enjoyment of the heavenly

^d Isai. xxv. 6.

^e Jer. xxxi. 25.

^f ver. 6.

^g Luke xiv. 18—20.

^h ver. 7.

ⁱ Luke xiv. 21.

feast, even if they were admitted to it. But they never can be admitted, nor to all eternity shall they ever “so much as taste” what the favoured guests shall feed upon in the presence of their God.]

But let me once more endeavour to execute my commission—

[Once more in the name of Almighty God I invite you, brethren, to come to the wedding-feast. And O, think *who it is that invites you*. It is God, and not man: the voice, though the voice of a feeble worm like yourselves, is as truly God’s, as if it came in thunder, or in audible sounds from heaven. And will you turn a deaf ear to him? to him who needs not you, and who invites you only that he may make you a partaker of his own blessedness and glory? Think also *to what a feast you are called*. In comparison of *that*, all that this world can give is but as the husks that the swine eat of — — — Think yet further, *how vain all your excuses are*. What have you to do that can be put in competition with the seeking and securing the salvation of the soul? — — — Think too *how bitter your regrets will soon be*. Soon you will behold the company that is set down at the marriage supper: but you will behold them at an unapproachable distance: and these reflections will then irresistibly force themselves upon your mind: ‘There I also might have been a happy guest, if only I would have accepted the invitations given me, and obeyed the call of Almighty God: but here am I, banished from the Saviour’s presence, and without a drop of water to cool my tongue. O! wretch that I am! I in vain look to rocks and mountains to fall upon me: they cannot perform for me that friendly office; they cannot hide me from the wrath of my offended God.’ Lastly, Think *how painful must be both your state and mine in the day when I shall give up my account of my present labours*. To save your souls alive is now the one object for which I minister, and for which I live. And in that day I must give an account of my ministry. But O! what an account will it be? ‘Did you deliver my message to them? Did you invite them to the wedding-feast? Did you press and urge them as it became you? Did you warn them of the consequences of declining my invitation?’ What answers must I give? I can say nothing which will not evince your guilt, and aggravate your condemnation. The Lord grant that such may never be the issue of my labours; but that I may have you all as “my joy and crown of rejoicing in that day!”]

MCCCLXXXIX.

THE SIN OF MAKING LIGHT OF CHRIST.

Matt. xxii. 5. *But they made light of it.*

WE are apt to condemn the Jews as blind and obstinate, because they rejected Christ in spite of the clearest evidence in his favour. But we ourselves are more guilty than they, because we enjoy much greater advantages for understanding the Gospel than they did, and yet are as regardless of it as they were.

Our blessed Lord illustrated their conduct by a marriage-feast, to which they who were invited refused to come. The same invitation is sent to us; and we, no less than they, "make light of it."

To bring home a conviction of this upon our minds, we shall shew,

I. What are the blessings which we are invited to partake of—

God is here represented as having made a marriage for his Son—

[The figure of a marriage union is often used to represent the connexion that subsists between Christ and his Church^a. He is the bridegroom, and the Church is his bride^b. And the connexion is then formed, when the Church gives up herself to Christ as her head and Lord, and by faith becomes so united to him as to be one flesh^c, or, to speak more properly, "one spirit with him^d."—]

The feast prepared on the occasion contains all the blessings of grace and glory—

[There is nothing that can nourish or delight the soul, which God has not prepared for the bride on her union with Christ^e. She instantly becomes related to him, and is considered in all things as his daughter, an object of his affections, and a partaker of his inheritance. Let any one inquire, What is there that my soul can desire in time or eternity? and he shall find it all set before him, that he may freely and richly enjoy it—]

^a Jer. iii. 14. Hos. ii. 19, 20.

^b Isai. liv. 5. Rev. xxi. 9. John iii. 29.

^d 1 Cor. vi. 17.

^c Eph. v. 30—32.

^e Isai. xxv. 6.

To a participation of this feast we are sent to invite you—

[In one view, they to whom we are sent, are the bride; but in another view, they are the guests. The commission God has given to his servants is, to “go out into the highways and hedges, and to bring in as many as they can find.” To you therefore we come, declaring that no unworthiness on your part shall exclude you, provided you put on the wedding garment, which the Master of the feast has prepared for you. Accept the invitation; and all the blessings of salvation shall be yours. Pardon, peace, strength, and whatever else can comfort the weary, and support the weak, shall become the daily, the everlasting food of your souls.]

To evince how much our message is disregarded, we proceed to shew,

II. Who are they that make light of the invitation—

Among the numberless classes that might be mentioned, two only shall be selected:

1. They who satisfy themselves with excuses for declining it—

[The persons mentioned in the context, excused themselves on account of their “farms or merchandize.” But their pleas, however satisfactory in their own eyes, were not admitted by God. On the contrary, he declared them to be “unworthy ever to taste of his supper.” Now what excuses has any man more urgent than these? And if these were of no avail in their case, what right have we to think, that the plea of worldly business will be admitted in our favour? If the prosecuting of our worldly business were really incompatible with the enjoyment of God, there can be no doubt which we ought to prefer. He was “a *wise* merchant, who having found a pearl of great price, sold all that he had and bought it.” But our duties to God and to the world are by no means irreconcilable with each other: and therefore the resting in such vain excuses shews, that we make light of the salvation offered us.]

2. They who do not accept it with all thankfulness—

[Blessings, like those set before us in the Gospel, ought to be regarded as of the first importance. Indifference towards them is a positive contempt of them. If a slave, whom we had ransomed at a great price, and to whom we offered liberty, and affluence, and honour, should express no gratitude, no joy on the occasion, should we not think that he “made light of” our proffered kindness? But what bondage is so dreadful as that in which we are held by sin and Satan? or what liberty

is like that of God's children? or what comparison is there between the riches and honours of this world, and those which are imparted to us on our union with Christ? If then our joy and gratitude excited by the Gospel salvation, be not in some measure proportioned to its value and importance, we cannot but be considered as making light of it.]

Nor will this be thought a venial matter, if we duly consider,

III. The folly and sinfulness of their conduct—

But what words can sufficiently express this? for they make light of,

1. That which is of the greatest possible value—

[Estimate the blessings of salvation either *positively* by the price paid for them, or *comparatively* by weighing them, as it were, in a balance against all other things, and then see what it is that they despise. Only consider, that every one of those blessings was bought with blood, with the blood of God's co-equal, co-eternal Son, a price infinitely exceeding ten thousand worlds. Is there no guilt, no folly in disregarding things of such inestimable value? Bring into competition with them all that the world can give; and it will be found lighter than dust upon the balance, yea, "altogether lighter than vanity itself." Well therefore does the Apostle put that unanswerable question, "How shall ye escape, if ye neglect *so great salvation*^f?"]

2. That without which they can never be happy—

[The creature, at best, is but "a broken cistern:" in vain shall any one go to it for solid happiness^g. "There is not, there cannot be, any true peace to the wicked^h." Let any man try to make himself happy, while the guilt of all his sins continues to lie upon him, and he is in awful suspense about his eternal state; he may be thoughtless as a child, or stupid as a beast; but he cannot be happy. And if this be the case in the midst of all his gaiety, what will be his situation in a dying hour? At all events, supposing him ever so happy in life and in death, how will he feel himself on his first entrance into the invisible world? Will he who made light of the marriage-feast on earth, sit down with boldness at the "marriage supper of the Lamb in heaven?" Will all those employments to which he was averse in this world, be at once his joy and delight, as soon as he passes into the world above? If he disregarded earthly things, he would have reason on his side; because he might be happy in God, even though he were destitute of every

^f Heb. ii. 3.

^g Jer. ii. 13.

^h Isai. xlviii. 22.

thing else: but to hope for happiness without God is a desperate delusion; and consequently, to make light of the invitations of the Gospel is nothing less than madness itself.]

3. That which they are sure to value, when it will be gone beyond recovery—

[*Here* men are of very different sentiments; some accounting godliness the one thing needful, and others despising it as enthusiasm and needless singularity. But in the eternal world there is no such diversity of opinion: the saints in glory are fully confirmed in the judgment they had formed on earth; and the wicked in hell are fully convinced of their error; the one know by their enjoyments how good it was to obey the heavenly call; and the other know by their sufferings, what “a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God.” What then is it but madness to make light of that, which we are so sure to value when there remains to us no longer any possibility of attaining it?¹

Let due weight be given to these considerations, and we shall need nothing more to convince us either of the folly or sinfulness of slighting the invitations of the Gospel.]

APPLICATION—

[It is to be feared that, after all, many will persist in their infatuated conduct: but we would at least make one more effort to reclaim them; and beg of God to render his word effectual to their conversion.]

Know then that the marriage supper is now prepared; and we, as God's servants, come in his name to invite you to it. We invite you *all*: the rich, the poor; the old, the young; the moral, the immoral. We announce to you, that all things are ready. Are *ye* then not ready? If ye say, “We have not a suitable garment;” we declare to you, that the Master of the feast has provided garments for all his guests; and that ye need only be clothed with the unspotted robe of Christ's righteousness, and ye shall instantly be acceptable in the sight of God. Put away then your excuses: receive thankfully the invitation sent you: and begin to feast upon those spiritual provisions that shall nourish your souls unto life eternal.]

¹ Wisd. v. 4.

MCCCXC.

THE WEDDING GARMENT.

Matt. xxii. 11—13. *And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: and he said unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not*

having a wedding-garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

THERE has ever been a diversity of characters in the Church of God. This, though much to be lamented, cannot be avoided. The very zeal which animates the ministers of the Gospel, has a tendency to produce this effect. Their charity prompts them to hope well of those who appear in earnest; and to admit to their communion all who “witness a good confession.” Thus it was that “the wedding (in the parable) was furnished with guests;” but he who searcheth the hearts will distinguish the hypocrites from others, and will deal with men according to their real characters.

This being intimated in the text, we shall endeavour to shew,

I. What we are to understand by the wedding garment—

The wedding-feast is intended to represent the blessings of the Gospel. The garment suited to the occasion must therefore import a meetness to partake of those blessings. In this view we may understand “the wedding-garment” as formed in part of *the righteousness of Christ*—

[Christ, by his own obedience unto death, wrought out a righteousness which is given “unto all, and put upon all, them that believe^a.” This is the only righteousness whereby any man can be justified before God^b. St. Paul himself could find acceptance in no other^c. It is in this that all the glorified saints are clothed^d: in fact, it constitutes their title to heaven^e: and it is in this that all the saints on earth are clothed, preparatory to their ascending to heaven^f. Hence the devout songs of those who have attained this gift: “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in the Lord: for he hath clothed me with *the garments of salvation*, he hath covered me with *the robe of righteousness*, as a bridegroom

^a Rom. iii. 22.

^b Rom. v. 18, 19. ^c Phil. iii. 9.

^d Rev. ix. 7.

^e Rev. v. 8. “*therefore.*”

^f Gal. iii. 27.

decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels^g.”]

But beyond all doubt it is chiefly formed of *our own inherent righteousness*—

[Moral qualities are often represented under the figure of a garment^h. By *them* chiefly we “put on the Lord Jesus Christⁱ.” And they beyond all question form the garment which renders us acceptable guests at the wedding feast in heaven^k. In fact, it is holiness alone that constitutes our meetness for heaven^l; and makes us “worthy” to partake of all the felicity and glory of that blessed place^m. I speak not of worthiness *in a way of merit*: that no man can have: but, *in a way of fitness and suitableness*, every man must have it: nor without it can any soul ever enter into the Divine presenceⁿ.]

We must however be careful not to confound these two ideas—

[*The righteousness of Christ* is necessary to *justify* us before God: *our own inward personal righteousness* is necessary to *make us meet* for glory. We must *not separate* them; for they cannot exist apart; *neither*, on the other hand, may we *confound* them: they must each be used for their respective ends. To disregard inherent righteousness would be downright antinomianism: on the other hand, to blend it in any degree with the righteousness of Christ for our justification before God, would be self-righteousness, and would make void the whole Gospel^o. Food and raiment are equally necessary for our existence: but each has its proper office: neither can supply the lack of the other. So it is with imputed and inherent righteousness: neither can be dispensed with, nor can either occupy the other’s place. To be accepted of God we must put on the righteousness of Christ; and to enjoy his presence, we must “put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness^p.”]

Such then being the wedding-garment, I proceed to shew,

II. The importance of it to every child of man—

A person habited in mean apparel would not be suffered to continue at the wedding-feast of an earthly monarch: much less shall guilty and polluted souls

^g Isai. lxi. 10.

^h Ps. cxxxii. 9. Job xxix. 14. 1 Pet. v. 5.

ⁱ Rom. xiii. 14.

^k Rev. xix. 7, 8.

^l Col. i. 12.

^m Rev. iii. 4.

ⁿ Heb. xii. 14.

^o Gal. v. 3, 4.

^p Eph. iv. 24.

sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb in heaven—

[The king, in the parable, was filled with indignation at the intrusion of the unworthy guest. He ordered him to be bound hand and foot, and cast into outer darkness^q. This fitly represents the vengeance that will be inflicted on all such intruders. They may come in for a while and join themselves to the Lord's people; but when the King himself shall see the guests, he will fix his eyes on them: he will cast them out from the place they had so presumptuously occupied. They shall never dwell in the mansions of light and glory above; but take their portion in the regions of darkness and despair, and there bewail for ever their irremediable delusions.]

Nor will their punishment in any respect exceed their guilt—

[The intruder, in the parable, could make no reply to the king's address^r. He knew that he had disregarded the offer of a wedding garment; and presumptuously supposed that his own was good enough for the occasion. Thus he had poured contempt on the liberality and kindness of the king; and was therefore compelled by his own conscience to acknowledge the justice of the sentence passed upon him. Who then amongst *us* shall expect to imitate him with impunity? To us has our Lord repeatedly offered a wedding garment. Us has he often counselled to receive his robe of righteousness^s. We have been invited to go to him for the influences of his Spirit^t. Shall we then expect admission into heaven if we reject his offers? Or shall we accuse him of severity if he cast us headlong into hell? Surely if we rest in any thing short of justification by his blood and renovation by his Spirit, we shall stand self-condemned for ever.]

IMPROVEMENT—

1. For conviction—

^q The room where the company was entertained being richly illuminated, the person cast out of it is said to be cast into *outer* darkness. How awfully applicable to those who shall be cast out of heaven!

^r He might have urged, That being brought suddenly out of the highways he had neither time to borrow, nor money to purchase, a wedding garment. But this would have been to no purpose. Opulent persons had large wardrobes for the accommodation of all their guests. Lucullus, at Rome, was famed for having at least two hundred changes of raiment, or as Horace, by a poetical licence, says, five thousand. No doubt, therefore, a proper garment would have been lent him for the occasion, if he had chosen to accept it.

^s Rev. iii. 18.

^t John vii. 37—39.

[As Christians we profess to have accepted the Saviour's invitation; and to feast at his table here as an earnest of that richer feast above. But have we indeed received Christ as our righteousness^u? Are we also renewed by his Spirit in our inward man^x? We may easily deceive those who minister to us here below; but "the King, who will come in to see the guests," can never be deceived. However specious a garb we may have prepared for ourselves, he will easily distinguish it from that which he has given to his people. Nor would he fail to discover the hypocrite, even if there were only one to be found in his whole Church. Surely then it becomes us to guard against self-deception. We may *now* obtain from him a meetness to feast with his chosen; but if we persist in our delusion, we shall find him inexorably severe.]

2. For consolation—

[Some perhaps are troubled on account of their past presumption; especially, that they have unworthily communicated at the Lord's table. Well indeed may such guilt fill them with compunction; but, however presumptuously we have acted in past times, we have no reason to despond. A wedding garment is now offered to all who see their need of it. Though we were of the poorest or vilest of mankind, it should not be withheld from us: nor, however many guests may come, will there be any deficiency of raiment for them all. Let all then accept the free invitation of the Gospel, and thankfully put on the garment which the Master of the feast has prepared for them. Thus, though unworthy in themselves, they shall be accounted worthy through Christ, and shall sit down for ever at the marriage feast in heaven.]

^u 2 Cor. v. 21. Jer. xxiii. 6.

^x 2 Cor. iv. 16.

MCCCXCI.

AN INQUIRY INTO OUR VIEWS OF CHRIST.

Matt. xxii. 41, 42. *While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, What think ye of Christ?*

THEY who are prejudiced against the Gospel, are ever studious to ensnare the preachers of it with

^a Before a congregation where less critical accuracy is required, this subject may be treated thus:

I. Propose the question—

- What think ye — 1. Of his person (he is God, as well as man).
2. Of his sufferings (they were altogether vicarious and expiatory).

captious, or, as they think, unanswerable questions. To such cavillers we should answer warily, and with meekness of wisdom: nor will it be unuseful, on some occasions, to propose to them in return some question, which shall lead their thoughts into a better channel. Our blessed Lord adopted this method after he had been successively interrogated by Pharisees, Sadducees, and Scribes^b. He returned to each a satisfactory answer, and silenced them at last by proposing to them a difficulty, which, with all their boasted wisdom, they were unable to solve.

Certainly the difficulty of reconciling these two characters of the Messiah was great: yet, if the Pharisees had been duly attentive to all the prophetic representations of the Messiah, they would have known, that there was to be in him an union of the most opposite states, of life and death, of sufferings and glory; and that, consequently, the humble state of Christ, at which they took offence, was no reason at all for their disbelieving his divine mission. *To shew them this, was the precise object of our blessed Lord in the question he put to them; and, in accordance with that design, I will shew,*

I. That the discordancies of Scripture are no bar to our believing in Christ—

There are, no doubt, in Scripture, very discordant representations of the Messiah—

[Of *his person*: he was to be the root, and yet the offspring of David, a little child, and yet the mighty God^c— —

3. Of his glory (he is in heaven as a public person, our Advocate, our Head, our Forerunner).

II. Shew the importance of it—

On our thoughts of him must depend — 1. Our devotion to him (which will be proportioned to our admiration of his character). 2. Our interest in him (which can arise only from our knowledge of him, and our faith in him). 3. Our acceptance with him in the last day (if we have low thoughts of him *now*, he will have low thoughts of us *then*. Mark viii. 38.).

^b Master, *what thinkest thou* of paying tribute to Cæsar? ver. 15, 17; of the resurrection of the body? ver. 23—28; of the commandments? ver. 35, 36.

^c Isai. ix. 6. Matt. xxii. 43—45. Rev. xxii. 16.

Of *his reception in the world*: he was to be an object of universal contempt and abhorrence; and yet to be universally admired and adored^d. Of *his end*: he was to die an accursed death, and yet to live for ever and ever — — — But the Pharisees noticed only those passages of Scripture which flattered their pride, and raised their expectations of temporal grandeur; and therefore they were “offended” at Jesus, whose condition in the world was poor and mean, and, as they thought, irreconcilable with the office which he professed to bear.]

Yet were these discordancies no just reason for their rejecting of Christ—

[In fact, if these discordancies had not been found in him, he could not have been the Messiah predicted in the Scriptures. Their union therefore in him was rather a reason why the people should believe in him; since it fulfilled every part of the inspired records, and gave to him a claim, which no other person ever did, or could, possess. The miracles which he wrought were such a demonstrative proof of his divine mission as no reasonable being could withstand. And these miracles, taken in connexion with the strict accomplishment of so many, and so apparently opposite, predictions, left no room for doubt on any rational and candid mind, that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.]

But my text leads me further to shew,

II. That the union of these discordancies in Christ Jesus is the very foundation of all our hopes—

If he had not been *man*, he could not have lived and died for us; as the Apostle says; “He was made lower than the angels for the suffering of death, that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man^e.” On the other hand,

He must have been *God*, else nothing that he either did or suffered could have been available for our salvation—

[Supposing him to have been a mere creature, *his obedience could not merit any thing for us*: for, “all that he could do would be no more than his bounden duty; and, having done it all, he would be only an unprofitable servant.” *Nor could his sufferings make any atonement for our sins*: for there is no proportion whatever between the sufferings of one creature for a time, and the sufferings of *countless millions* of creatures

^d Isai. liii. 3. and xlix. 7. Ps. xxii. 6. with Ps. lxxii. 8, 10, 11.

^e Heb. ii. 9.

to all eternity. However exalted the creature might be, his blood could no more be available for the salvation of the whole world, than the blood of bulls and of goats, of which, we are told, it is not possible that it should take away sins^f. Nor could his intercession be of any avail for us; seeing that he would have no effectual plea to urge in our behalf. Nor, in fact, could his appointment to govern the world secure to us the blessings we stand in need of; since, without omniscience, he could not know all our necessities; nor, without omnipotence could he supply them.]

But, being God as well as man, he is equal to the work he has undertaken for us—

[His duty gives an infinite value both to his obedience and his sufferings; insomuch that *his sufferings* were a *sufficient atonement* for the sins of the whole world; and *his obedience* formed a *sufficient righteousness* for the justification of all who should be clothed with it. *His intercession* too, founded as it is in the efficacy of his atonement, is *sure to prevail* in our behalf; whilst, as *Head over all things to his Church*, he can supply out of his own fulness *all who call upon him*. In him, as God-man, there is such a sufficiency, that no man, however desperate his condition, has any reason to despond; nor, if with a penitent and believing heart he apply to Jesus, has he any reason to fear: for, Jesus “is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him.”]

APPLICATION—

In the parable of the Sower, our Lord said, “Take heed *what* ye hear;” and, “Take heed *how* ye hear.” Thus, in reference to my text, I would ask,

1. “*What* think ye of Christ?”

[Many alas! think not of him at all. Notwithstanding they call themselves Christians, Christ is as much banished from their conversation and from their minds, as if he had never come from heaven for them, and never borne their sins in his own body on the cross. God, as a *Creator*, is sometimes acknowledged, and sometimes, under particular providences, as the *Governor of the world*: but CHRIST, as a *Redeemer*, seems quite forgotten: and the very mention of him under that character is sufficient to cast a damp upon all social hilarity, and to bring reproach upon his advocate as an unmannerly enthusiast. But, beloved brethren, we should make ourselves acquainted with the character of Christ as revealed in the prophecies of the Old Testament, and as exhibited in the records

^f Heb. x. 4.

of the New Testament. We should view him as “God manifest in the flesh,” and “purchasing the Church with *his own blood*.” We should view him in his *person, work, and offices*: for if we know him not as he is delineated in the Scriptures of truth, we can never truly believe in him, nor can we ever finally be saved by him. I charge you then, brethren, to inquire carefully *what* ye think of Christ, and to compare your thoughts with the revelation of God concerning him.]

2. *How think ye of Christ?*

[Do you think of him as you ought to think? Do you think of him *with an application of him to your own soul*? It is of very little use to entertain theories in *your head*, if you do not get them realized in *your heart*. You will never know him to any good purpose, unless you apply to him under all his characters for the mercies you stand in need of, and make him all your salvation and all your desire.

I ask yet further, Do you think of him *with the adoring gratitude which he deserves at your hands*? This is what God requires; and nothing short of this will constitute you Christians indeed. See how the redeemed honour him in heaven: they are singing incessant praises to him as having “loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood, and made them kings and priests unto God and the Father: yea, to him they ascribe all glory and dominion for ever and ever.” And such *should be* your state on earth; yea and such *will it be* to a considerable extent, if you are walking in any measure worthy of your high calling. Begin then this course, if you have not already begun it, and prosecute it with ever-increasing diligence, if you have: so will you be filled with unutterable and abiding joy^g; so will you also be transformed into your Saviour’s image^h, and be rendered “meet for the inheritance of his saints in light.”]

^g 1 Pet. i. 8.

^h 2 Cor. iii. 18.

MCCCXCII.

CHRIST THE SON AND LORD OF DAVID.

Matt. xxii. 42—46. *What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son? And no man was able to answer him a word; neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions.*

THAT there are difficulties in the Scriptures, is certain: but they are greatly augmented by men's negligence in comparing the different parts of Scripture with each other, and their indisposition to receive truths which oppose their pre-conceived opinions. Had the character of the Messiah, as drawn in the writings of the prophets, been duly considered, the Jews would have seen that our blessed Lord corresponded with it in every particular; and that, whether he spake of himself as God, or as man, as reigning or as suffering, he was the very person to whom all the prophecies referred, and in whom they were about to be accomplished. Amongst the many things at which they took offence in the discourses of our Lord, that which most inflamed their wrath was his claim to an equality with God. For this they often took up stones to stone him^a: and for this, at last, they put him to death^b. But our blessed Lord had left them wholly without excuse. But a few days before they put him to death, whilst the Pharisees (who had laboured by all possible means "to entangle him in his talk," but whom, by all his answers, he had confounded) were yet present with him; he, in his turn, put to them this question, "What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?" They, without hesitation, replied, "The son of David." This was right: to this the prophets all bear witness: and it was agreeable to the sentiments and expectations of the whole nation. Our Lord then asked them, why David, when speaking by inspiration from God, called him Lord, saying, "The Lord said to my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?" Here was doubtless a difficulty: but it was a difficulty which, if they had understood the Scriptures, they might easily have solved. They, however, "were not able to answer him a word."

It is much to be regretted, that, even amongst persons calling themselves Christians, there are many

^a John viii. 58, 59. and x. 30—33.

^b Mark xiv. 61—64. and John xix. 7.

who are at a loss to answer this question; and who, from their inability to reconcile the apparently opposite assertions, are led to doubt, or even to deny, the divinity of our blessed Lord.

That you may be established in this fundamental truth of our holy religion, I will,

I. Solve the difficulty that is here proposed—

The difficulty, no doubt, was great—

[The Pharisees all acknowledged David as a prophet of the Lord: and they were all persuaded, that in this psalm he spake respecting the Messiah, whose future triumphs he predicted. Had they been able to say that those words were not inspired; or that they did not refer to the Messiah; or that our Lord had misapplied them in any respect; though they had not given a solution of the difficulty, they would, in a measure, have extricated themselves from it. But they could not: and it is of great importance for us to bear in mind, that on no occasion whatever did the Jews ever controvert the application which was made of the prophecies, either by Christ or his apostles; and that all the interpretations which have been suggested by Jews of later days, have been invented for the purpose of invalidating the arguments of Christians founded upon them; which arguments, upon a just interpretation of the Scriptures, they were not able to withstand. They saw that David really spoke of one, who, at the distance of a thousand years, was to spring from his loins; and that yet he had called this very person his Lord and Governor. Had he said, ‘The Lord said to my *son*, Sit thou on my right hand,’ the sense would have been clear and easy: but how could he say, ‘The Lord said to my *Lord*?’ David himself was the greatest of all the kings of Israel; and yet he speaks of a person who should descend from him at a remote period; and of a person who, as the event proved, was the son of a poor carpenter, as his *Lord*.]

But, had they understood the Scriptures, they might have solved the difficulty with ease—

[They knew, and universally acknowledged, that the Prophet Micah spake of the Messiah, when he said, “Thou Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be Ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting^c.” Now here the pre-existent

^c Mic. v. 2.

state of Christ is clearly declared; declared, too, in terms that can refer to none but God himself, seeing that he alone is "from everlasting." This passage alone was sufficient to furnish them with the true answer. But the Prophet Isaiah had spoken more clearly still; and had distinctly declared, that the person who was to be "a child born and a son given, was no other than the Mighty God^d;" and that "the child that should be born of a virgin should be called Emmanuel, God with us^e." Thus their own Scriptures informed them that the Messiah must be David's *Lord*, according to his divine nature, (being indeed the Lord both of heaven and earth;) whilst yet, according to his human nature, which he was to assume from the posterity of David, he was to be truly and properly David's *Son*.

In the New Testament, as might be expected, this truth is yet more abundantly confirmed. Our Lord himself spoke of his own existence previous to his incarnation; saying, "Before Abraham was, I am." Yea, he declared that "he had a glory with the Father before the world was;" and that "He and the Father were One." Very remarkable are those words which he addressed in a vision to the Apostle John: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord; which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty^f." What can be conceived more expressly declarative of his Divinity than this? To the same effect the beloved disciple himself speaks: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us^g." St. Paul also says, that "being in the form of God, and counting it not robbery to be equal with God, he made himself of no reputation, (he *emptied* himself, or divested himself of all his glory,) and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men^h." From these and other similar passages it is evident, that he is "God manifest in the fleshⁱ," even "God over all, blessed for ever^k." And thus you see that he is in truth both "the Root and the Offspring of David^l."

The Pharisees, not understanding this, were unable to return an answer to our Lord: nor, as long as the world shall stand, can any man solve the difficulty, but by acknowledging the Divinity of Christ. If it be said, that the very passage that is cited by our Lord proves his inferiority to the Father, because it is the Father who "exalts him to his right hand, and puts all his enemies under his feet;" I answer, that, as man, and as Mediator, he was inferior to the Father; whilst, as God, he is

^d Isai. ix. 6.^e Isai. vii. 14.^f Rev. i. 8.^g John i. 1, 14.^h Phil. ii. 6, 7.ⁱ 1 Tim. iii. 16.^k Rom. ix. 5.^l Rev. xxii. 16.

equal with the Father, and altogether one with him. In his Mediatorial capacity he is doubtless indebted to the Father's agency: for who knows not, who acknowledges not, that, as Mediator, he is the Father's "servant," sent to do his will^m? But if we are so blind as not to be able to distinguish between his essential nature as God, and his assumed office as Mediator, it is in vain to hope that we shall ever solve the difficulty in the text ourselves, or understand the solution of it which the Scriptures have afforded us.]

I now come to,

II. Shew the importance of the truth which is thus elicited—

This truth is at the very root of all our hopes, both in this world and the world to come: it is that on which depends,

1. The virtue of his atonement—

[If the Lord Jesus Christ be a mere creature, what virtue can there be in his blood to atone for the sins of men? The Apostle tells us, that "it is not possible for the blood of bulls and of goats to take away sin." But, if the efficacy of the sacrifice depended merely on the arbitrary appointment of God, he might as well have appointed one creature to make atonement as another: nor was there any such difference between one creature and another, that, whilst it was not possible for the blood of one to expiate even so much as one sin, the other should be sufficient to take away the sins of the whole world. On this supposition, there could be no force whatever in that argument which the Apostle, with so much confidence, addresses to us: "If the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh; how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works, to serve the living Godⁿ?" that is, if the blood of one creature availeth for the smallest thing, how much more shall the blood of another creature avail for the greatest? In the argument so stated, there is not only no force, but not even common sense; and the appeal will recoil on the Apostle, to his own confusion. But, admitting the Divinity of Christ, the argument is incontrovertible: for if the blood of any creature can effect the smallest thing, much more will the blood of the Creator, who is God as well as man, effect the greatest. Here the argument is clear, and the appeal absolutely irresistible.

^m Isai. xlii. 1.

ⁿ Heb. ix. 13, 14.

Know, then, what a foundation you have for your hopes towards God. Know that Christ is a sufficient "propitiation for the sins of the whole world;" that "his blood will cleanse from all sin;" and that "all who believe in him shall be justified from all things."]

2. The efficacy of his grace—

[The Lord Jesus Christ, in his exalted state, is appointed "Head over all things to the Church;" every member of which is to look to him for a supply of all his wants, both temporal and spiritual. But, if he be a creature only, how can he execute this trust? At the very same instant that you are crying to him here for the relief of your necessities, there are millions of others spreading their wants before him in every quarter of the globe: and how can he attend to all? Ubiquity is the prerogative of God alone: a creature cannot be every where present at the same time: it is God alone that filleth all things: so that, if he be not God, you have no assurance that he can help you under your difficulties, and afford you the desired relief. In what a distressing state would you then be left! and what painful anxieties must corrode your breast! But when you know that he is God as well as man, your fears are all dispelled; for he can hear your every cry, and satisfy your every want. There can be nothing impossible to him, if he be "the Mighty God:" and consequently, whilst living by faith on him, you are assured that "his grace shall be sufficient for you," and that "no weapon that has been formed against you shall prosper."]

3. The glory and excellency of his salvation—

[On any supposition, if Christ be only *a man*, and have by any means effected our salvation, we are unspeakably indebted to him, and to God for him. But still, methinks, he is richly repaid, in having his sufferings for so short a time compensated with such a reward as the everlasting salvation of millions of the human race. But, if he be *God* equal with the Father, eternally happy and glorious in himself, and absolutely incapable of being rendered either more happy or more glorious by any acquisition of happiness to us, what do we then owe him for all his inconceivable condescension and love? It is *this* which constitutes the glory of redemption; the incarnation of God's co-equal, co-eternal Son; his substitution in the place of sinful man; his vicarious sacrifice upon the cross; his completion of salvation for us by his own obedience unto death; his ascension to heaven, as our fore-runner; his investiture with all power in heaven and in earth, that he may perfect both for us, and in us, the work he has begun: *this*, I say, it is which renders the whole plan of redemption so

wonderful, and which forms the one subject of adoration and thanksgiving amongst all the myriads of the redeemed in heaven. Divest it of *this*, and you despoil God of his honour, and man of his felicity: for I hesitate not to say, that it is from these considerations, chiefly, that heaven itself will derive its chief happiness.]

Let me, in CONCLUSION, call your attention to the duties which this view of the Messiah necessarily brings with it:

1. Believe in Jesus with your whole hearts—

[If, as you have seen, he is indeed God as well as man, “he is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him.” You need not fear to cast yourselves entirely on him. Hear how this very thought is suggested by the Prophet Isaiah, speaking to us in the Messiah’s name: “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; *for I am God*, and none else.” Hear, too, what encouragement he further gives you to repose all your hope and confidence in him: “Surely shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength.” If Jehovah be your righteousness, who shall condemn you? and if Jehovah be your strength, who shall overcome you? Again then, I say, Cast yourselves on him; for “in the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and in Him shall they glory.”]

2. Serve and glorify him with your whole souls—

[If he be David’s Lord, no doubt he is yours also: and that he is worthy to be obeyed by you, it is needless for me to observe. My text calls me to notice, not so much *his worthiness* to be served, as *your obligation* to obey him. If you come to him as a Saviour, you must also take his yoke upon you^s. This, I say, *must* be done: for the Father has pledged himself, that “all his enemies shall be his footstool.” Jesus is “seated at the right hand of God,” and will assuredly prevail over all opposition; and they who bow not to the sceptre of his grace will be “broken in pieces by him, as a potter’s vessel.” See, then, that he be your Lord, not in word only, but in deed and in truth. See that your whole souls be subjected to his dominion, and that “every thought of your hearts be brought into a willing captivity to the obedience of Christ” — — —]

^o Isai. xlv. 22.

^q Isai. xlv. 24. with Rom. viii. 33, 34.

^s Matt. xi. 28, 29.

^p Isai. xlv. 24.

^r Isai. xlv. 25.

^t Ps. ii. 9.

MCCCXCIII.

OUR RELATION TO CHRIST AND TO EACH OTHER.

Matt. xxiii. 8. *One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.*

THE mind of man naturally affects pre-eminence and power: and this was peculiarly the habit of the Scribes and Pharisees in our Lord's day. The hatefulness of such a disposition he pointed out to them, and strongly guarded his disciples against it; shewing them, that the Messiah alone was to be regarded as the source and centre of all authority; and that they, of whatever rank they were, were to consider each other as brethren.

Now, in treating this admonition, I shall consider it,

I. With an immediate reference to the subject in hand—

Two things our blessed Lord designed to teach his disciples;

1. Not to affect pre-eminence for themselves—

["Rabbi" was a title which conveyed the highest possible respect: and therefore it was so fondly delighted in by the Scribes and Pharisees. It, in fact, ascribed to the person so designated a very high degree of wisdom; such as justified him in dictating to others, and in having his sentiments propounded as a law. But our blessed Lord would have it known, that there is no wisdom which is not derived from him, nor any authority but what proceeds from him; and that therefore all must look to him, and him alone, as giving law to his people, and as regulating, in every respect, whatever relates either to their faith or practice — — —]

2. Not to usurp authority over others—

[As "Christ is the one Master of all," so is "Almighty God the Father of all:" all, therefore, are fellow-servants in the same household, and "brethren" in the same family. There are, indeed, different offices to be performed by servants; but no servant is at liberty to exercise an independent authority: and so also are there different ages amongst brethren; but in their feelings towards each other they are not any of them to forget for one moment the relation in which they stand. Instead of domineering over one another, those who stand the highest in authority should condescend to take the lowest

place in the offices of love, even as our blessed Lord himself did, when he washed his disciples' feet^a — — —]

But as this view of the words is rather for persons who take a lead in the Church, I shall proceed to notice them,

II. In a more general and extended view—

“We have but one Master, even Christ”—

[O, brethren, think how “many lords have had dominion over you,” and how grievously you have neglected the work which Christ has given you to do! Remember, I pray you, that as, in our families, every servant has his proper work assigned him, and is expected to perform it from day to day; so have you your proper office to perform in the family of Christ: and you should be able, at the close of every day, to say as Christ himself did, “Father, I have glorified thee on earth; I have finished the work which thou hast given me to do” — — —]

As for all our fellow-Christians, they are our “brethren”—

[Our Lord did not intend to forbid titles of distinction. It is of necessity that some should be addressed by the name of “Father,” and others by the name of “Master.” That which is here forbidden, is the affecting of such titles, as marks of high distinction, and as means of great authority. Lowliness is that which our Lord approves, and which is the proper fruit of Christianity in the soul. In a family, all are studious to promote the welfare of each other, and ready to make sacrifices for each other's good. This is the spirit which we should cultivate towards all the members of Christ's mystical body, yea, and towards every individual of mankind — — —]

LEARN here, my brethren,

1. The sublime nature of Christianity, as forming the character of individuals—

[Christianity does not regulate the outward conduct only, but forms the habit of the mind to humility and love — — —]

2. The blessed tendency of Christianity, as contributing to the welfare of the community—

[What a world would this be, if all were brought to this standard of morals, this exercise of mutual kindness! Look at the primitive Church, and there you see it realized^b. O that it might be realized amongst us; and that every one of us in our respective spheres might thus shine as lights in the world! — — —]

^a ver. 11. with John xiii. 13—15.

^b Acts ii. 44—47.

MCCCXCIV.

CHRIST'S COMPASSION AND MAN'S OBSTINACY CONTRASTED.

Matt. xxiii. 37. *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!*

THE enmity of the human heart against God, visible as it is in all our conduct, is discoverable in nothing more than in the treatment which has been shewn in all ages to his faithful servants. One might well expect, that persons commissioned by the Governor of the Universe to instruct and reform mankind, should be welcomed with every expression of love and gratitude. But historic fact precluded a possibility of reply to that pungent question of our Lord, "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" Nevertheless, God in infinite mercy, after a host of messengers had in succession been cruelly put to death, vouchsafed to send his only dear Son, with credentials indisputable, with authority unparalleled, with compassion infinite. Yet was not even his ministry successful. The obduracy of man withstood all his kind solicitations; and constrained him, with his dying breath, to testify against his devoted country as self-ruined and self-condemned.

The words before us will naturally lead us to consider,

I. The tender compassion of Christ—

The simile by which our Lord illustrates his own tenderness, is admirably calculated to impress and edify our minds. It is familiar to all, and therefore intelligible to the meanest capacity: at the same time it gives us as just an idea of parental anxiety as any image can convey. A hen, observing a bird of prey hovering over her young, instantly sounds an alarm, and calls them to her for protection. Thus our blessed Lord warned sinners in the days of his flesh: and thus he still warns them,

1. By his providence—

[All the dispensations of Providence, whether relating to the world at large, or to ourselves in particular, have a voice which may be heard with ease, and interpreted with certainty. Whether they be of a more painful or pleasing nature, they may alike be regarded as calls to turn from sin, and to seek our happiness in God. And if we had been as attentive to the dictates of reason as the chickens are to the impulse of their natural instinct, we should long since have turned at God's reproofs, "and been led by his goodness to repentance."]

2. By his word—

[What are all the warnings, the invitations, the promises of the Gospel but so many expressions of that tender regard which Christ bears to his people^a? Surely, if we be not more deaf than the adder, we cannot but acknowledge, that in all these Christ is speaking to us, and entreating us to flee from the wrath to come. Moreover, whenever the ministers of the Gospel have spoken to us in the name of Christ, our adorable Saviour has addressed us by their mouth.]

3. By his Spirit—

[There is no man so obdurate, but he has felt, and perhaps still occasionally feels, some convictions and remonstrances within his own bosom, some secret admonitions to repent and turn to God. We call these properly 'the voice of conscience;' but they are also the 'voice of Christ,' that "small still voice" whereby he invites us to seek his face. And in them, no less than in the written word, we have a demonstration of the concern which Christ has for the welfare of our souls, and of his solicitude to gather us under the shadow of his wings.]

But these efforts, instead of being requited as they ought, afford us only an occasion of contemplating,

II. The unrelenting obstinacy of man—

In the midst of all these overtures of mercy, man continues insensible, and,

1. Denies that any danger exists—

[The Saviour beholds the law denouncing its curse against us, and justice unsheathing its sword to enforce its awful sanctions, and hell opening to swallow us up quick, and the fallen angels, as ministers of God's vengeance, ready to concur in executing upon us the punishment we deserve. Of these things he warns us: but we, like the inhabitants of Sodom, laugh at the impending judgments, and, because we do not

^a Prov. i. 22, 23. Isai. lv. 1—3. John vii. 37—39.

see them with our eyes, deny their existence. How lamentable is it, that we should be more stupid and incredulous than the brute creation; and that our conduct, instead of being suited to the nobler faculties we enjoy, should be in perfect contrast with theirs!]

2. Contents himself with false refuges—

[When we can no longer deny the existence of danger, we then look out for such refuges as will be most congenial with our natural feelings, and will leave us most at liberty to follow our own ways. Many speedily present themselves to our view. Some repentance, some reformation, some alms-deeds, some religious observances, afford, as we imagine, ample security for our souls, while yet they require no great exercise of self-denial in fleeing to them. But in choosing these refuges of lies, we renounce the Saviour: we turn from that adorable "Shiloh, to whom the gathering of the people must be;" and expose ourselves to inevitable, everlasting destruction.]

3. Prefers temporal and carnal pleasures to those which are spiritual and eternal—

[When the necessity of fleeing to Christ for refuge is not acknowledged, the vanities of the world are suffered to stand in competition with our duty to him, and are preferred before the security which he offers. Thus the Saviour's calls are disregarded. The chickens, however occupied in picking up their food, will not disregard their parent's call: but sinful man is obstinately bent on the prosecution of some favourite pursuit; and the complaint in the text is fully verified, "How often would I, but ye would not!"]

Let us IMPROVE this subject in a way of,

1. Inquiry—

[Have we ever felt our danger of perishing, and taken shelter under our Redeemer's wings? We can be at no loss to answer this question, if only we will consult the records of our own conscience. The necessity of fleeing thus to Christ is plainly intimated in the image before us, and attested by innumerable other passages of Holy Writ. Know then, that if your own hearts condemn you, you have an evidence within yourselves that you are yet exposed to the wrath of God. O tremble at the thought, and flee without delay to the refuge set before you!]

2. Admonition—

[It is to little purpose to deny our danger. If the helpless chickens should disregard their parent's call, under the idea that the warning given them was the result of ungrounded fear, would their denial of the danger free them from it?

Would not their presumption bring upon them the very destruction which they refused to shun? Thus it will be with those who despise the Saviour's voice. Their security will be their ruin. Nor will they be at all more safe, if they content themselves with coming nearer to him in the ordinances, while they defer hiding themselves altogether under the shadow of his wings. It is there alone that they can find protection: and if they be not "found in him," the "wrath of God will surely come upon them to the uttermost." Be thankful then, that, after so many calls have been despised, the voice of mercy is yet sounding in your ears.]

3. Encouragement—

[Whom is it that the Saviour calls? The innocent, the good, the virtuous? No; but those who had embroiled their hands in the blood of all his martyred servants: and these he calls with tenderest compassion, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem:" to these he appeals, that he had renewed his invitations to them times without number, and that, if they perish, they will be the sole authors of their own destruction: "How often would I have gathered you, but ye would not!" Know then, beloved, that your former sins, however numerous or heinous, shall be no bar to your acceptance, if only you will flee to Christ. Over you he weeps, as he once did over the murderous Jerusalem; and he declares unto you, that "Whosoever cometh to him, he will in no wise cast out." Remember that, if you perish, it will not be through any want of willingness in Christ to save you: and that that very consideration, which is now so encouraging, will one day fill you with inconceivable anguish; "*Christ would, but I would not.*" O let not that reflection be suffered to embitter your eternal state; but now let your reluctance be overcome; and obey the voice that warns you only for your good.]

MCCCXCV.

CAUTION AGAINST DECLENSION IN RELIGION.

Matt. xxiv. 12, 13. *Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.*

THESE words are a part of the discourse which our Lord held with four of his disciples in private, after he had retired from the Temple to the Mount of Olives. Being in full view of the Temple, his

^a Compare Mark xiii. 1—4. with Matt. xxiv. 1, 2.

disciples were struck with the magnificence of its appearance, and expressed to him their admiration of it: from whence he took occasion to foretell the speedy destruction of it, and to give them signs whereby they should ascertain the approach of the judgments which awaited their whole nation. At the same time he gave them instructions for their own support and comfort under all the trials which they themselves should endure previous to that time. He told them what evil treatment they should meet with from the enemies of his Gospel; and what difficulties they should encounter from his pretended friends. Their trials *from without* must be waved at present. Those *from within* we propose for our present consideration.

In the words before us our Lord suggests to his disciples,

I. The danger of spiritual declension—

Independent of the proneness of man at all times to backslide from God, there is a danger arising to us from the conduct of those with whom we stand connected. The bitterness of persecution, or abounding of corruption, may operate to abate our zeal in the service of our God; but the falls and offences of those who profess religion have a peculiar tendency to discourage the people of God; and it is to this, we apprehend, our Lord more especially refers.

Such events must be expected in every age—

[If we consult the Holy Scriptures, we shall find that, even in the apostolic age, multitudes who were once hopeful, declined from the ways of God, and made shipwreck both of faith and of a good conscience^b — — — And what is there to prevent a recurrence of the same evils? As long as the heart of man is so evil and so treacherous, it will ever be prone to start aside from God, even as a broken bow — — —]

Whenever they do happen, they tend to quench the love even of the most established—

[Great disappointment is felt by all the members of the Christian Church: and every one feels a portion of that

^b 2 Tim. i. 15. and ii. 17. and iv. 10.

disgrace which the instability of any member brings upon the whole body. From the frailty of some, the fidelity of others begins to be questioned: evil surmisings arise: a coolness and distance are occasioned among the brethren: the communion of the saints is interrupted; and their associations for holy exercises are less frequented, or less enjoyed^c. Divisions then ensue: each leader endeavours to increase the number of his partisans: and thus all that union and harmony which should characterize the family of Christ, is destroyed.

Hence arises also a coldness of heart towards God himself, and a loss of fellowship with him — — — In a word, the almost inseparable effect of an irruption of iniquity into the Church of God is, that “the love of many at least, if not of all, will wax cold.” One single “root of bitterness springing up, will trouble and defile many^d.”]

Such danger always existing, we proceed to suggest,

II. A preservative against it—

Two things are certain, namely, That *on our continuance in well-doing our salvation depends*; and, That *by our continuance in well-doing our salvation is secured*: and the consideration of these two points will, under God, prove an excellent antidote against all the dangers to which we can be exposed.

Consider then, that

1. *On our continuance in well-doing our salvation depends—*

[To this truth the whole voice of Scripture bears witness. We know full well that there are many promises made to the people of God; and that of those who have been given to Christ he will lose none. But it were a dreadful perversion of those promises, to think that we can be saved in any other way than that of “a patient continuance in well-doing^e.” We must not attempt to make void the most positive declarations of Holy Writ^f — — — but must learn, like the Apostle Paul himself, to make them an incentive to unwearied watchfulness and diligence^g — — —]

2. *By our continuance in well-doing our salvation is secured—*

[The promise in our text is absolute and universal: and throughout every part of Scripture God says to us, “Be thou

^c Heb. x. 24, 25.

^d Heb. xii. 15.

^e Rom. ii. 7.

^f Ezek. xviii. 24. and xxxiii. 12, 13. Heb. x. 26, 27, 38, 39.

^g 1 Cor. ix. 27.

faithful unto death; and I will give thee a crown of life" — — — We need not disquiet ourselves about God's fulfilment of his promises: let us only attend to our own duties, and leave him to accomplish his own word in his own time and way. We shall find at last, that "not a jot or tittle of his word has ever failed" — — — The words of our text were fulfilled literally to *every true disciple* at the destruction of Jerusalem, when *every apostate* perished. A refuge was provided for the whole body of Christians, at Pella, and a way was opened for their escape thither: and so it shall be in the day of judgment, when Christ's faithful servants *universally*, and they *only*, shall be saved.]

3. The consideration of these truths would be an effectual preservative against spiritual declension—

[Suppose iniquity to abound ever so much, what is that to *us*, except as a matter of grief and lamentation for the persons who commit it? Let the iniquity shew itself in any *persons*, or in any *degree*, it is no reason that our love to God and man should wax cold: it should rather operate as a reason for us to stir up our love to a flame, in order to impede the progress of the corruption, or at least to prevent its assaults upon our own souls; as travellers in a wilderness kindle fires around them, in order to protect themselves from the assaults of ravenous and ferocious beasts. At all events, however much any persons may injure their own souls, and endanger their own salvation, it becomes us to take care that they do not destroy or injure us — — —]

ADDRESS—

1. Let us above all things cultivate a spirit of love—

[This is the characteristic feature of all God's children: and the want of it, whatever else we may possess, proves us to be only as sounding brass or as tinkling cymbals^h. A growth in this is the surest evidence of our growth in graceⁱ — — — and by this, more than by any thing else, is our establishment in the divine life secured^k — — — Let us then "take care lest any root of bitterness spring up in our hearts;" and let us daily "put on charity, which is *the bond of perfectness*^l."]

2. Let us beg of God the assistance of his Holy Spirit—

[The consideration of our final happiness depending so entirely on our own continuance in well-doing, would be discouraging, if we did not know, that God has promised to us the aids

^h 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.

ⁱ 2 Thess. i. 3, 4.

^k 1 Thess. iii. 12, 13.

^l Col. iii. 14.

of his Spirit ; and that “ the grace of Christ shall be sufficient for us.” See how graciously the Lord supported Paul, when all his Christian friends had forsaken him in his greatest extremity : “ At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me : I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge : notwithstanding, the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me^m.” Thus shall you find him present with you in every hour of trial, and be made “ more than conquerors through him that loved you.”]

^m 2 Tim. iv. 16.

MCCCXCVI.

THE TEN VIRGINS.

Matt. xxv. 10. *And they that were ready went in with him to the marriage : and the door was shut.*

TOWARDS the close of his ministry our Lord insisted much upon the vengeance which should in a little time be inflicted on the Jewish nation, and upon the general judgment which was to be typified by that event. He the rather dwelt on these subjects that he might keep up in the minds of his disciples an expectation of his future advent, and stimulate them to such incessant vigilance as might enable them to behold his face with joy. In the passage before us he compares his final appearance to the sudden return of a bridegroom ; and the state of mankind to that of virgins who had been appointed to pay him the customary honours^a. He mentions two different descriptions of persons who had undertaken that office, and from whose character and end they might derive the most important instruction. We shall be profitably employed whilst we,

I. Compare their character—

There was much wherein the wise and foolish virgins appeared to resemble each other—

[Both of them professed to be waiting the arrival of the heavenly bridegroom : both, while the bridegroom tarried, became unwatchful, and were overpowered with sleep : both were alarmed at the sudden tidings of his approach, and

^a Here read the whole parable.

instantly began to put themselves in a state of readiness to meet him. This fitly describes the state of the visible Church, in which, the professed intentions of all are exactly similar. All believe that Christ will come again to judge the world; and profess to be waiting for his arrival: all too are apt to be off their guard, and to yield to slothfulness. As for hypocrites, they are immersed in the deepest sleep; and even the best of men are sometimes remiss; yea, their utmost vigilance may be almost called a slumber, when compared with that activity and vigour of mind which they ought ever to preserve. The prospect of death and judgment is awful to persons of every description: much as the bridegroom's arrival is desired, it is a solemn event to all; nor can the holiest of men look forward to it but "with fear and trembling." Often is his approach announced, when we, alas! are but little prepared for his reception: but all agree in preparing for him when he appears to be near at hand: even hypocrites "in their affliction will cry, Arise and save us:" and all, except the most obdurate reprobates, will feel a desire to meet him with acceptance.]

But notwithstanding this resemblance between the wise and foolish virgins, they widely differed from each other.

[The wise virgins had taken the precaution to secure oil in their vessels, that in case the bridegroom should tarry, they might have wherewith to replenish their lamps, and not be destitute of it in the hour of need. But the foolish virgins were contented with just so much as would enable them to make a fair shew for the present; nor were they at all aware of the danger to which their improvidence exposed them: hence when the cry was made at midnight, the wise virgins had only to trim their lamps, which, though burning dimly, were yet alight; but the foolish ones found their lamps extinguished; nor even knew how, or where, they should obtain a supply of oil. Instantly they requested the other virgins to impart to them of theirs; but were advised to go and procure it where alone it was to be obtained. The bridegroom however coming during their absence, the wisdom of the provident, and the folly of the improvident, were made apparent.

Now such is the difference that still exists between many professors of religion; many have really the grace of God in their hearts; these have seen the danger of an unconverted state, and have received that unction of the Holy One, which they stood in need of: they know how strict the scrutiny will be in the last day, and have therefore prayed, that the Holy Ghost might be shed forth abundantly upon them through Christ Jesus. But others there are (would to God they were few!) who have taken up a profession lightly, and who are satisfied

with having a form of godliness while they are destitute of its power. In an hour of alarm, they fly to the creature rather than to God. Even they who scoffed at religion in a time of health, will send for a minister, or some godly neighbour, in a prospect of death; but there they stop, and find to their cost the inefficacy of these means. Had they applied to Christ in due time, they might have "bought oil of him without money and without price:" but the bridegroom's arrival finds them unprovided; and they are left to bewail the bitter consequences of their folly.]

There being no further room for comparison, we shall now,

II. Contrast their end—

The wise virgins, who were ready, were admitted with the bridegroom into the marriage feast—

[It was customary for the virgins, who came forth to attend the bridegroom, to participate the pleasures of the nuptial feast. This gives a just idea of their happiness who shall be found ready at the coming of their Lord: they shall enter into the chamber where all the guests are assembled; they shall hear the bridegroom's voice, and enjoy the testimonies of his regard: the feast provided by God himself shall refresh their souls, while all the harmony of heaven shall fill them with exquisite delight: then all painful watchings and anxious expectations for ever cease: no longer have they any corruptions to contend with, or any drowsiness to regret: their fears are dissipated, their hopes are realized, and their most enlarged desires are swallowed up in actual fruition.]

The foolish virgins, who neglected their preparation, were for ever excluded—

[No sooner was the bridegroom with his retinue entered into the house, than the door was shut. The door, which shut in the one, precluded all hope of admittance to the other. In vain did the foolish virgins come and cry for admission; all knowledge of them was disclaimed by the bridegroom, and they were left in "outer darkness." Thus will it be to those who shall be called hence before they are prepared to meet their God: the door of heaven will be shut against them; the supplications, which a little before would have prevailed, will now be disregarded: they honoured not the Lord in their life; nor will he now honour or acknowledge them: they are cut off from all hope of joining that blest society, or of tasting the heavenly banquet: nor will they merely suffer a privation of happiness; they will be consigned over to the punishment due to their offences, a punishment exquisite, irremediable, eternal.]

The IMPROVEMENT suggested by our Lord will properly close the subject—

[The grand scope of the parable is, to shew us the need of watchfulness; and the chief argument to enforce that duty is, the uncertainty of the time when our Lord shall come. And is there any one, to whom we have not occasion to direct our exhortation? Ye who, like the foolish virgins, have never yet obtained “the oil of joy and gladness,” watch against self-deception: you may make a specious profession of religion, and take occasion from the infirmities of true Christians to think yourselves in as good a state as they. But it will soon appear who they are that have the grace of God in their hearts; and who have only “a name to live, while they really are dead.” Perhaps ye think that ye shall have time enough to provide oil when the bridegroom’s approach shall be announced: but ye know not whether ye shall have any warning, or whether ye shall be able to obtain it *then*, if ye neglect the present opportunity. Be assured that, if the bridegroom come, he will not stay for you, but will enter with those who are ready, and leave the rest behind him. O think, what will ye do if the door should be shut against you? how will ye bewail your folly! Be persuaded *now* to improve your time. Apply for oil to him who “has the residue of the Spirit,” and will “give the Holy Spirit unto them that ask him.” Go not to the creature, no, not even to the ordinances, as though they *of themselves* could impart this blessing. Ministers and ordinances are, as it were, the pipes through which it shall be conveyed; but Christ, in his person and offices, is the one source of grace; and out of his fulness must ye all receive^b.

As for you, who, like the wise virgins, are endued with grace, still continue to “watch.” You see from your own experience what need you have of this exhortation. Too often have you slumbered and slept already, and thereby exposed yourselves to many alarms. Henceforth “let your lamps be trimmed, your loins girt, and yourselves in actual readiness to attend your Lord.” Then, at whatever hour he shall come, ye shall have no cause to fear; ye shall behold him with joy, and participate his glory for evermore.

“What we say then to you, we say unto all, WATCH.”^c

^b Zech. iv. 12—14.

^c If this were the subject of a *Funeral Sermon*, this would be the proper place to shew how the deceased had received grace from Christ, and how bright his light had shone, and how prepared he was for the summons he received.

MCCCXCVII.

THE TALENTS.

Matt. xxv. 22, 23. *He also that had received two talents, came, and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His Lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*

THE solemnities of the day of judgment were a frequent subject of our Lord's discourse. This was a topic well calculated to fix the attention of his hearers. The nearer he drew towards the close of his ministry, the more he insisted on it: nor can we too often dwell upon it in our minds. The parable before us leads us to the contemplation of this awful subject: it very nearly resembles the parable of *The Pounds*^a. Yet are there some important points of difference between them^b.

These points will furnish occasion for two important observations:

I. God bestows gifts on every man according to his own sovereign will—

God is the source and author of every blessing we enjoy—

[To him we owe it that we were brought into the world of Christian, rather than of heathen, parents. From him we have received all our bodily and intellectual powers. We possess nothing good, which we have not derived from him^c.]

He dispenses extremely various gifts to various persons—

^a Luke xix. 12—26. In both the parables a rich man going to a distant country committed a sum of money to his servants to improve for him, and on his return dealt with them according to the use they had made of it, rewarding the faithful and punishing the negligent.

^b In that of *the pounds* all the servants had an *equal sum* committed to them: but they made a *different improvement* of them, and were therefore *differently rewarded*. In the parable before us, the *sums* committed to the servants were *different*; but their *improvement* of them was *equal* (each having doubled his deposit) and therefore their *reward* was *equal* also.

^c Jam. i. 17.

[The greater part of the world are left by him in gross darkness. To the Jews he vouchsafed the light of his revealed will. The light that just dawned on them, has visited us in its meridian splendour. But some in this Christian land are scarcely more instructed in the knowledge of Christ, than if they had no concern with him: others again have had their eyes opened to behold his glory. Great was the diversity of gifts bestowed on the Christians of old^d; and there is the same distinction made in the Church at this day^e. Hence we are called “stewards of the manifold grace of God^f.”]

These he bestows according to his own sovereign will—

[The rich man in the parable gave to “each according to his several ability^g.” Thus while he acted *sovereignly*, he acted also *wisely*, and *in this point of view only* can that circumstance be applied. It is not true that God bestows the richest talents on the most able men^h: besides, the very abilities we possess are derived from him alone; and, if man’s ability were the measure of God’s gifts, man would have room to boastⁱ. God acts in all things according to his sovereign will^k. Nevertheless his will is guided by consummate wisdom^l: and every person, whatever his lot be, must confess with the Apostle^m—. These considerations are indeed humiliating to our proud hearts; but they are inexpressibly comforting to those whose talents are small, and whose afflictions are many. Let such persons weigh them well, and make use of them for the suppressing of envy and discontentⁿ.]

We may well be satisfied with his conduct in this respect; for,

II. He will reward every man, not so much according to the talents he possesses, as according to his fidelity in improving them—

A man, endued with great gifts, will not be the more approved on that account—

^d 1 Cor. xii. 5—12.

^e Eph. iv. 7.

^f 1 Pet. iv. 10.

^g ver. 15.

^h 1 Cor. i. 26, 27.

ⁱ 1 Cor. iv. 7.

^k Dan. iv. 35.

^l Eph. i. 11. “The counsel of his will.”

^m Eph. i. 8.

ⁿ This is a little digression from the subject; or rather an application of it: but it is peculiarly proper in this place, in order to shew that the sovereignty of God is not a speculative point merely, but a practical, and most comforting doctrine. We are all placed, like the different members of the body, each in the fittest place: and were our situations altered otherwise than God has ordained, the change would be to the detriment both of the individual member, and of the whole body. See 1 Cor. xii. 11, 12, 18.

[The mere possession of great talents does not alter our moral character. Judas was not at all inferior in knowledge to the other Apostles; nor was he less endued with a power of working miracles than they. All his opportunities of spiritual improvement were the same as theirs; but his heart was not changed by means of these privileges; nor was his person the more accepted of God on account of them. On the contrary, the greater his privileges, the greater was his guilt in neglecting to improve them; and he now surpasses others in nothing but shame and misery^o. To this purpose are those warnings which our Lord gave to the cities of Judæa^p: nor are those warnings inapplicable to those who hear his Gospel *now*.]

Nor will a person of the smallest talents be on that account overlooked—

["God looks not at the outward appearance, but at the heart^q: he notices them that are of a broken and contrite spirit^r. Few perhaps have been more destitute of gifts than Lazarus: yet how far better is his state now than the Rich Man's^s! The widow that possessed but two mites, was destitute enough; but the use she made of them was more acceptable to God than all the rich offerings of the opulent^t. Thus, if we only improve what we have, we cannot fail of a reward. On the contrary, if we bury our talent, though it be but "one," we shall be punished for it.]

The Scriptures speak strongly upon each of these points—

[They plainly declare that there are degrees of reward and punishment^u. Our Lord assures us, that the punishment of men will be proportioned to the light against which they have sinned^x: and St. Paul affirms, that our services shall be accepted in proportion as they corresponded with our ability to perform them^y.]

INFER—

1. What little reason is there to envy those who have great talents!

[It is evident that an increase of talent only increases our responsibility. To many, the advantages they have abused are now their greatest torment; and what reason have we to think, that our diligence in serving God would be excited in proportion as our opportunities were enlarged? We all have too much

^o Acts i. 25.

^p Matt. xi. 21—24.

^q 1 Sam. xvi. 7.

^r Isai. lxvi. 2.

^s Luke xvi. 23, 24.

^t Mark xii. 43, 44.

^u 1 Cor. xv. 41, 42. 2 Pet. ii. 21.

^x Luke xii. 47, 48.

^y 2 Cor. viii. 12.

reason to lament our past unprofitableness. Let us therefore rather improve what we have, than covet what we have not.]

2. How earnest should every one be in trading with the talent committed to him!

[The time is shortly coming when we must give up our account to God: and how awful will it be to be cast out as “wicked and slothful servants!” How will such characters weep and wail for the opportunities they have lost! On the contrary, how delightful to hear the Saviour’s plaudit! What a recompence, to “enter into the joy of our Lord!” O let every soul exert itself to the utmost in his service. Let none be discouraged because they can do but little for God. Many who condemn themselves as vile and faithless, shall hear him say, “Well done, good and faithful servants:” and many, who are ready to tremble with apprehensions of his wrath, shall be made partakers of his felicity and glory.]

3. How little should we regard the attempts of the ungodly to repress our zeal!

[Men never condemn their own stewards for being too faithful or diligent: yet if any of the Lord’s stewards labour to improve their talent, the world cry out against them as over-righteous. But “it is a very small matter to be judged of man’s judgment.” Let the world exclaim against us as hypocrites or enthusiasts, if the Judge of all do but account us good and faithful: His plaudit will abundantly compensate for the obloquy we endured. Let us then, every one for himself, “stir up the gift of God that is in us;” and let us exhort one another in the words of inspiration^z—.]

^z 1 Cor. xv. 58.

MCCCXCVIII.

THE DAY OF JUDGMENT.

Matt. xxv. 34, 41, 46. *Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.*

IT is scarcely needful in a Christian assembly to prove that there will be a Day of Judgment; because no one entertains a doubt respecting it: but to

impress on our minds a consideration of the judicial process, and of the eternal consequences which will instantly ensue, is of the utmost importance. Taking for granted, therefore, that there is amongst us a certain and universal expectation of that day, we shall proceed to notice the description which the Judge himself has given of it, from its commencement to its termination.

Let us call your attention to,

I. The preparatory solemnities—

These are comprised under two heads :

1. The coming of the Judge—

[Our blessed Lord is ordained to be the Judge both of the quick and dead. It is of himself that he speaks, when he says, “The Son of Man” shall come^a. As the Son of Man, he stood at the bar of Pilate : and, as the Son of Man, he will summon the universe to his tribunal. As the Son of Man, he himself was judged, condemned, executed : and, as the Son of Man, he will pass judgment on all, whether men or devils. At his first advent he appeared in the lowest state of degradation, “a worm, and no man, a reproach of men, and despised of the people”^b: but in that day “he will come with power and great glory,” surrounded by myriads of *his* holy angels. The pomp and glory of his appearing will infinitely surpass either the lustre of Mount Tabor, or the more terrific splendour of Mount Sinai^c. His throne will be erected in the air ; and the books, both “the book of his remembrance,” wherein the actions of men were recorded, and the volume of inspiration, whereby they are to be judged, will be opened before him^d.]

2. The summoning of those who are to be judged—

“Before him shall be gathered all nations.” Every creature, from Adam to the last of his descendants, shall appear in one vast assembly. Not one shall be absent : not one will be able to withstand the summons of the Almighty, or to elude his search. “The great and mighty of the earth” shall then stand on a level with the meanest beggar^e. Every one shall appear in his own proper body^f. As for the difficulty of collecting the scattered atoms of every individual, atoms that have been transformed into ten thousand different shapes, this

^a ver. 31.

^b Ps. xxii. 6.

^c Matt. xxiv. 30, 31. 2 Thess. i. 7, 8.

^d Dan. vii. 9, 10. and *thrice mentioned* Rev. xx. 12.

^e Rev. vi. 15.

^f 1 Cor. xv. 38, 42.

is no difficulty with God: he who created them out of nothing by a mere act of his will, can by a similar act of volition reunite the atoms that are necessary to constitute our personal identity: and he will do it “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump:” and when the dead are raised, then, and not till then, will he change the bodies of those who are alive upon the earth, that they also, together with those who are risen, may “meet the Lord in the air^g.”]

The whole human race being come into the presence of their Judge, he will proceed to,

II. The trial—

There will be a strict inquiry into their respective works—

[We do not suppose that their regard to him and his salvation will be overlooked^h: but it will be ascertained by the fruits which they brought forth. If their faith was not productive of good works, it will be accounted only as the faith of devils. But what are the fruits which alone will be considered as just evidences of our love to Christ? *O that this matter were duly weighed amongst us!* It will not be asked merely, Whether we transgressed the law by grosser acts of sin, such as uncleanness, or drunkenness, or theft, or perjury, or murder; but whether we were active in doing good to our fellow-creatures *for Christ's sake?* Whether we “fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick,” and delighted ourselves in all offices of love to our fellow-creatures from a sense of love to Christ, and with a view to his gloryⁱ? Yes, on this will the salvation or condemnation of men depend. Mark it well, my brethren. It is not for formal duties or empty professions that any will be applauded, but for active, diligent, unremitted exertions in the cause of Christ: **NOR IS IT FOR SINS OF COMMISSION MERELY THAT ANY WILL PERISH, BUT FOR SINS OF OMISSION^k.**]

Then will they be separated according to their true characters—

[The characters of all will then be as easily discerned as sheep are discerned from goats; and they will be separated accordingly, “the sheep on the right hand of their Judge, and the goats on his left hand.” Then will be seen two wonderful sights; the righteous, however separated from each other by trifling forms or various sentiments on earth, all united in one

^g 1 Thess. iv. 15—17.

^h Mark xvi. 16. Heb. ii. 3.

ⁱ ver. 35, 36.

^k Compare Matt. vii. 21. with ver. 25, 27, 30. and ver. 42, 43.

body, and perfectly of one heart and mind. Nor will there be so much as one hypocrite found amongst them: the tares which now grow among the wheat will all be plucked up: the wolves in sheep's clothing will all be detected; and the whole collective mass be holy, even as God himself is holy. Then also will all the wicked be standing in one vast congregation together. Those who had mixed themselves with the saints on earth will have the mask taken away, and be made to appear in all their natural deformity: and those trembling saints who were wont to number themselves amongst them, will have had their integrity cleared, and their doubts removed: and all, whether righteous or wicked, will take their proper place, according as the evidence, adduced before their Judge, attested or disproved their piety.]

The trial closed, the Judge will proceed immediately to,

III. The sentence—

He will first address himself to those on his right hand—

[Among the reasons which might be assigned for his first pronouncing sentence on the righteous, the principal seems to be, that they are to be his assessors in judgment, and to confirm the sentence which he will pronounce upon the ungodly¹. But from the moment of their separation, what joy will fill every breast! What mutual congratulations will resound on every side! How delightful will be their anticipation of the felicity that awaits them! What smiles too will beam forth in the countenance of their Judge, when he shall turn towards them!

In his address to them, though he mentions their good works, in order to manifest the equity of his procedure, yet he traces up all their blessedness to the sovereign grace of him, who had loved them “from before the foundation of the world.” It was the Father who had chosen them from all eternity^m, who had sent them a Saviour; who in due time had called them by his grace; and who was the true source of all the blessings they enjoyedⁿ. Hence he calls them, “Ye blessed of my Father.” In bidding them to take possession of “the kingdom prepared for them,” he marks very strongly the same idea: for he tells them to “inherit” it: by which he clearly intimates, that it was neither earned nor purchased by them, but attained through their adoption into God's family, and their consequent regeneration by the Spirit of grace.

Surely the sound of these gracious words must pour all heaven into the souls of all to whom they are addressed.]

¹ Matt. xix. 28. ^m Eph. i. 4. ⁿ Jam. i. 17.

Then he will turn unto those upon his left hand—

[But how is his countenance now changed! What anger, what indignation flames in his eyes! And what terrible displeasure is conveyed in his voice! The grounds of their condemnation are explicitly declared. They had neglected to serve him, and to do the things that were pleasing in his sight; and therefore they are bidden to “depart accursed.” And it is worthy of observation, that they are not said to be cursed of his Father: no; though the saints owe their felicity to the election of the Father, the wicked do not owe their misery to any arbitrary act of reprobation: the righteous are blessed *of the Father*; the wicked are cursed *of themselves*; it is to their own neglect of duty that they must trace their eternal condemnation: they perish, not because there was any want of mercy in God the Father, or of merit in God the Son; but because “they rejected the counsel of God,” and would not accept his proffered salvation^o. In this world they had said to God, “Depart from me; I desire not the knowledge of thy ways^p,” and in that world their Judge will reply, Depart from me; I desire not the knowledge of your souls: “I never knew you, ye workers of iniquity.” The place into which they are to depart was not indeed prepared for *them*, as heaven was for the saints: it was “prepared for the devil and his angels:” but as the wicked are partakers of their guilt, they shall be also of their punishment.]

Then will come,

IV. The execution—

The righteous shall be borne up into the regions of eternal bliss—

[On the pronouncing of the sentence, the heavens will be opened, and all the saints will ascend thither to take possession of their thrones. But who can conceive the happiness of those who are admitted into the presence of their God; who are placed beyond the reach of sin or sorrow, and have an eternity of blessedness before them? What praises, what adorations, and hosannahs will resound through all the courts of heaven!]

The wicked shall be cast down into the regions of eternal misery—

[We attempt not to describe their misery; for it passes the power of words to express, or of imagination to conceive: but this we assert, that it will be truly and properly eternal. It

^o In this respect the text exactly accords with Rom. ix. 22, 23. where the Apostle states that the vessels of mercy were prepared for it by God; but the vessels of wrath were fitted for it by themselves.

^p Job xxi. 14.

shall co-exist with the felicity of heaven; for its duration is expressed by the very same word^a. If any doubt the eternity of hell-torments, I ask, What shall ever terminate them? Will the fire that is kindled there be extinguished? or the souls that are cast into it be consumed? Or shall they be purified in the fire, and be exalted at a future period to the regions of bliss? No one of these things shall be: "The fire shall not be quenched:" "the worm of a guilty conscience shall never die^r:" and, instead of being improved by their misery, the sufferers will gnaw their tongues for anguish, and blaspheme that God who inflicts their punishment^s. Besides, there is a gulf fixed betwixt them and the saints in glory; so that none shall ever pass from the one place to the other, or experience the smallest change in their condition^t. How terrible will then be the state of the ungodly! How "will they call upon the hills to fall upon them, and the rocks to cover them from the wrath of the Lamb!" But, what they would not believe, they now feel to their cost; and shall feel, as long as God himself shall endure, even for ever and ever.]

INFER—

1. How desirable is it to be prepared for death and judgment!

[This is the time for preparation: the moment death arrives, our state is fixed for ever: "As the tree falleth, so it lieth." What folly then is it to procrastinate, and to defer our preparation! If death would stay for us, and we could command the influences of the Spirit, and ensure repentance at the last, there were some reason for delay: but when we know not but that the next hour we may be summoned into the presence of our Judge, or that the grace we now despise shall never be offered us again, what madness is it to lose the present moment, and to trifle on the brink of such a precipice! Awake, brethren, from your stupor; and "prepare to meet your God." Go to the Saviour, while yet there is hope concerning you: and let it be the one concern of your lives to "flee from the wrath to come."]

2. How important is it to form a just judgment of our own character!

[Suppose for a moment that we judge ourselves now with somewhat too great severity, what harm is done? We disquiet ourselves indeed a little more than is necessary for a few days;

^a αἰώνιον. It is in vain to say that αἰὼν signifies a limited period; for the duration of heaven and of hell are equal: and if we limit the one, we must limit the other also.

^r Mark ix. 43—48. ^s Rev. xvi. 8—11. ^t Luke xvi. 26.

but we are stirred up to greater diligence and circumspection ; and are stimulated to exert ourselves more earnestly for the securing of the prize. But what if we lean too much to the favourable side ? It will be too late to remedy our error when once we pass into the eternal world. There is no repentance in the grave. It will be no excuse to say, " Lord, I was mistaken ; I did not think so much strictness was necessary ; I thought that such characters as I were safe^u." Now, therefore, " judge yourselves, that ye be not judged of the Lord." Inquire now, what is the tenour of your life. Do not be contented to examine whether you have committed any gross sin ; but inquire whether you are running as in a race, and striving to the utmost to glorify your God by all possible acts and offices of love ? Examine particularly, whether all that you do is, not to purchase heaven, but to testify your love to Christ ? If you bring yourselves to any lower standard than this, you will deceive yourselves to your eternal ruin. But, if, after a strict inquiry into these things, " your conscience condemn you not, then have you a scriptural confidence towards God^x."]^y

^u Matt. vii. 22, 23.

^x 1 John iii. 21.

^y If this were the subject of a *Charity Sermon*, it would be proper here to recommend the charity, and to exhort them to beneficence ; but at the same time to caution them against the idea of *meriting* heaven by their alms-deeds ; and to remind them, that their love must spring from faith in Christ, and be exercised simply for his sake, and to his glory.

MCCCXCIX.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHARITABLE EXERTIONS.

Matt. xxv. 35—40. *I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat : I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink : I was a stranger, and ye took me in : naked, and ye clothed me : I was sick, and ye visited me : I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee ? or thirsty, and gave thee drink ? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in ? or naked, and clothed thee ? or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee ? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*

THE solemnities of the Day of Judgment can never be too attentively considered : and we have reason to be thankful that they are here so plainly set before

us. The coming of the Judge, the summoning of the universe before his tribunal, the separation of the righteous and the wicked, and the sentence that shall be passed on all the human race, are exhibited, as it were, in this passage before our eyes. But there is one thing here specified, which is more peculiarly interesting to us, inasmuch as it either divests that day of all its horrors, or must cause us to look forward to it with inexpressible dread; I mean, *the ground upon which the decision will be formed*, and the doom of every individual be fixed. That the whole of our principles and conduct will be taken into consideration, there can be no doubt; but there is one point which will be inquired into, and will be regarded as a certain evidence of all the rest, namely, our activity in doing good to our fellow-creatures for Christ's sake: and, according as we shall be found to have abounded, or been defective, in that, will our definitive sentence be passed. This is asserted by the Judge himself: and the terms in which he has expressed it lead me to shew,

I. The proper exercises of Christian benevolence—

Love is the distinguishing feature of a true Christian—

["God is love;" and every one that is born of God, is "created anew after his image." The natural selfishness of the human heart is subdued and mortified by the grace of God; and "the new creature" desires to "live no more unto himself, but unto that Saviour who died for him." "What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits?" is his daily inquiry. To requite the Saviour he finds impossible: and therefore he looks out for others to be the representatives of his Lord, that through them he may manifest his sense of the mercies vouchsafed unto him. He is not contented with cultivating devout affections in his heart, but endeavours to render them substantially operative towards man. In a word, he exercises faith; but it is a "faith that worketh by love."]

The poor and afflicted are the more peculiar objects of that love—

[Doubtless love, in its most extended sense, comprehends much more than mere benevolence to the poor: but it is shewn in this particularly; and, wherever it exists, will manifest itself

in this in a more abundant measure. We have a bright example of this in the person of Job^a. So highly did he esteem these duties, that, if he had been remiss in them, he would have accounted himself deserving of the heaviest judgments^b. The conduct of the first Christians is not precisely of the kind we are considering; nor is it of necessity to be imitated by us: but it proves to what an extent the principle of love will carry us, if occasion require it at our hands^c. But the example of the Macedonian Churches comes home fully to the point; and shews us, that not even the deepest poverty, or the severest affliction, will preclude the exercise of self-denying kindness, when love has a just ascendant over our hearts^d. We lay the more stress on this, because it was proposed for the imitation of the whole Corinthian Church; and because the formation of such a principle, and the production of such a conduct, is the main scope and intent of the Gospel. The particulars specified in our text attest this — — as does also that saying of the Apostle, “Bear ye one another’s burthens, and so fulfil the law of Christ^e.”]

To such exertions we may well be stimulated, if we consider,

II. The acceptableness of them to the Lord Jesus—

The Lord Jesus identifies himself with his afflicted people—

[He has sympathized with them in every period of the world. What was it but compassion that caused him to undertake the cause of fallen man? When Israel was in Egypt, he heard their cries, and pitied their sorrows^f. Whilst they sojourned in the Wilderness, “in all their afflictions he was afflicted.” In his state of humiliation, “he made himself poor for their sakes, that they through his poverty might be rich:” and now, in his exalted state, he considers their cause his own. Are they persecuted? *he*, as he told the persecuting Saul, is the person injured^g. “Whoso toucheth them, toucheth the apple of his eye.” Are they relieved? he tells us in the text, that every office of love shewn to men for his sake he accepts, as shewn to *him*. He esteems the meanest of his people as “a brother,” and will acknowledge him as such before the assembled universe: or rather, he esteems him as a member of his own body; in the prosperity and happiness of which the Head is no less interested than the member itself.]

^a Job xxix. 11—16.

^b Job xxxi. 16—20, 22.

^c Acts iv. 32—35.

^d 2 Cor. viii. 1—4.

^e Gal. vi. 2.

^f Exod. iii. 7.

^g Acts ix. 4; 5.

What a fund has this one declaration laid up for them in every age of the world!

[We cannot conceive any other thing which could have so forcibly interested the mind of man. The obligations which we owe to Christ infinitely exceed any thing which words can express, or imagination can conceive. Were he therefore to command any thing, the hope of pleasing him would be a strong incentive to his believing people to obey him: but when he declares, that he will accept as done for himself whatsoever is done for others in his name, methinks the diligence of all in serving him should so anticipate the wants and wishes of mankind, as almost to banish misery from the world. But, though the greatness of human miseries, and the fewness of the Lord's people, preclude the hope of such an event as this, yet this one consideration, of administering to the Lord Jesus Christ in the person of his people, animates thousands to the most ardent zeal, and carries them through the most self-denying exertions.]

If we need any further stimulus to such exercises, let us consider,

III. The importance of them to ourselves—

The issue of the final judgment depends altogether upon them. In that day they will be brought forth,

1. As an evidence of our state—

[As God has taught us to judge of the tree by its fruits, so will he himself do in the day of judgment: and, whatever may have been our professions of faith and love, he will judge of them only by the fruits which they have produced. The fruits after which he will inquire, and by which he will be determined, are those spoken of in the text. Where they are found, there must a living faith and real piety have existed^h: and, where they are not found, there must have been an entire absence of true love to Godⁱ. By this test, therefore, shall every man be tried; and, according to this shall he stand or fall^k.]

2. As a justification of our sentence—

[The day of judgment is emphatically called “the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God^l,” and it is appointed, not so much for the awarding of happiness or misery to the sons of men, as for the display of God's equity in these decisions. Much is spoken in the Scriptures of God's having chosen men to salvation, and predestinated them to the adoption of children: and, beyond all doubt, the whole glory of man's salvation must be given to him: but still he will evince

^h Jam. i. 27. ⁱ 1 John iii. 17. ^k Jam. ii. 13. ^l Rom. ii. 5.

to the whole assembled universe that there is an equity in his proceedings, and that the destinies of all exactly correspond with their moral characters. The labours of love, in which the righteous had abounded, are here produced; and those whom Christ here speaks of as "his brethren," are ready to attest the truth of his assertions. On the other hand, the neglect imputed to the others is obvious: and though they attempt to extenuate their guilt, it is brought home to them in the completest manner; nor have they one word to utter in arrest of judgment. Thus is the righteousness of God made manifest; "he is justified in what he speaks, and clear in the judgment which he passes^m."

3. As a measure of our reward—

[We must not imagine that men are saved on account of any *merit* of their own. It is not possible that their works of love should ever purchase so great a reward as will then be given them. Indeed, the surprise which they express, "When saw we thee, &c.?" clearly shews, that they had not founded their hopes upon their own works: they had been redeemed to God by the precious blood of Christ; and in Christ they had trusted as the only Saviour of the world: but God is pleased to notice the works which they had done for his sake, and to bestow on them "a reward of grace:" nor is even a cup of cold water, which had been given to a disciple for his sake, suffered to pass without an appropriate reward. Hence we see that the more we abound in works of charity, the more exalted will be our happiness in heaven: whilst, on the other hand, the more means and opportunities of doing good we have neglected, the heavier will be our condemnation to all eternity.]

We would further IMPROVE this subject—

1. For our instruction in general—

[If such be the particular objects to be inquired into, how little prepared are most of us to meet our God! The generality think it sufficient if they do not *occasion* sorrow, though they never exert themselves diligently to *relieve* it: but let it be known and peculiarly marked, that the *omission* of these duties is of itself sufficient to condemn us; and that the sentence of condemnation that is here denounced against the wicked, refers, not to any thing which they have done, but to what they have left undone. I know, indeed, that all have not the same ability, or the same opportunity to relieve their afflicted neighbours: but have we availed ourselves of the opportunities that have been afforded us? If we have, though our efforts have been few and weak, they shall be accepted;

^m Ps. li. 4.

for "if there be in us a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not:" but if we have not, let us not deceive ourselves with vain hopes; for, "as unprofitable servants, we shall be cast into outer darkness, where is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth."]

2. In reference to the occasion before us—

[The charity for which we plead has a near affinity with that described in our text^a — — We call upon you then to assist it, by personal exertions, if you can, but at all events by liberal contributions. What would you do if Christ himself were now present, and soliciting your assistance? Would you send him away unpitied and unrelieved? Would you not rather vie with each other, who should be most forward, and most liberal in his relief? Know then that he is present, and will accept at your hands whatever you do for him. Know also, that the harvest which you will reap shall be proportioned to the seed you sow^o.]

^a The particular objects of the *Charity* should be here stated.

^o 2 Cor. ix. 6.

MCCCC.

THE FEARFUL PROSPECT OF THE IMPENITENT.

Matt. xxvi. 24. *It had been good for that man if he had not been born.*

"KNOWN unto God are all his works, from the foundation of the world." But the fore-ordination of God does not in any degree affect the responsibility of man. Man is altogether a free agent, in every thing that he does, whether it be good or evil. The Spirit of God may move him; or Satan may tempt him: but he does nothing without the concurrence of his own will. Hence, when St. Peter tells the Jews that our blessed Lord was "delivered up to death by the determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God," he still fixes the guilt of his death on them; saying, "Him ye have taken, and with wicked hands have crucified and slain^a." So, in the passage before us, our blessed Lord speaks to the same effect. It had been written of him, "Mine own familiar friend, whom I trusted, who did eat of my bread, hath lift up his heel against me^b." And, in reference to this

^a Acts ii. 23.

^b Compare ver. 23. with Ps. xli. 9.

prediction, our Lord says, "The Son of man goeth as it was written of him; but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born."

That we may make a suitable improvement of this awful declaration, I will,

I. Shew of whom this may be spoken—

We must not confine this declaration to the person of whom our Lord spake; since it is equally applicable to a great variety of characters. It may be applied to,

1. The *Traitor* who *sells* his Lord—

[To Judas the words are primarily applied. But are there no other persons who sell their Lord? What is the conduct of the lewd voluptuary, the sordid worldling, the ambitious candidate for honour? Each of them says, 'Give me but my price, and I will sell my Lord.' Each of them, in his own particular way, acts the part of "Esau, who sold his birthright for a mess of pottage^c." Tell them, when in the pursuit of their respective objects, what a loss they must sustain; and they regard you not: the pleasures, the riches, the honours, which they affect, are, in their eyes, of paramount importance; and follow them they will, though they must sacrifice all hopes of ever enjoying the favour of their God — — I must say, that these may kiss their Saviour in the sight of men, but they are traitors to him in the estimation of their God; and, as such, must expect to be made monuments of his righteous indignation.]

2. The *Infidel*, who *denies* him—

[The Scribes and Pharisees rejected our blessed Lord, notwithstanding all the miracles he wrought in proof of his Messiahship: and "their end was according to their works^d." And are there not, at this day also, infidels who reject Christ, and, under an affectation of superior wisdom, pour contempt upon the Gospel, as a "cunningly-devised fable," deriding its doctrines as enthusiastic, and its precepts as needlessly severe? These persons designate themselves *rational* Christians; as though "wisdom should die with them:" but they are the most irrational of all Christians; since they set up their own vain conceits above the inspired records, and their own wisdom above the wisdom of their God. And shall it not shortly be said, in reference to them, "Bring hither those

^c Heb. xii. 16.

^d 2 Cor. xi. 15.

that were mine enemies, and slay them before me?" Yes, "there remaineth for them no other sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking-for of judgment, and fiery indignation, to devour them^e."]

3. The *Apostate*, who *renounces* him—

[We are told respecting those who, "after having once escaped the pollutions of the world, are again entangled with them, and overcome; that their last end is worse than their beginning; and that it had been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness, than, after having known it, to depart from the holy commandment that had been delivered to them^f." And how many are there, at this day, who have "left off to be wise^g," and "gone back to their evil ways^h," and "turned again with the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mireⁱ!" Yes, there are, alas! many who "run well only for a season^k;" and, "under the influence of temptation," like the stony-ground hearers, "fall away." What, then, is their state? "They turn back unto perdition," and seal up themselves under the everlasting "displeasure of their God^l."]

4. The *Hypocrite*, who *dishonours* him—

[None have a severer doom than persons of this description. To have the most dreadful portion, is to "have our portion with the hypocrites^m." To cry with pretended zeal, "Lord, Lord!" whilst we do not the things which he commandsⁿ, can answer no other end than that of deceiving our own souls^o. "Our hearts must be right with God," if ever we would be accepted of him^p: and the retaining of a single lust, though dear as a right hand or a right eye, will plunge us into inevitable and everlasting perdition^q. The more distinguished our profession may be, the greater is our sin, if, "whilst we profess to know God, in works we deny him^r:" our excellency may mount up to the heavens, and our head may reach unto the clouds; but the issue will be, that we shall perish for ever like our own dung; and they who have seen us will say, "Where is he? where is he^s?"

Concerning every one of these persons, so living, and so dying, it must be said, as of Judas, "It had been good for that man if he had not been born."]

And shall I not now,

^e Heb. x. 26, 27.

^h Ps. lxxviii. 57.

ⁱ Heb. x. 38, 39.

^o Luke vi. 46.

^r Tit. i. 16.

^f 2 Pet. ii. 21.

ⁱ 2 Pet. ii. 22.

^m Matt. xxiv. 51.

^p Ps. lxxviii. 37.

^s Job xx. 4—7.

^g Ps. xxxvi. 3.

^k Gal. v. 7.

ⁿ Matt. vii. 21—23.

^q Matt. v. 29, 30.

II. Take up a lamentation over them—

Our blessed Lord “wept over Jerusalem,” which he saw devoted to destruction. And shall not “mine eyes be a fountain of tears, to run down day and night” for so many of you as, I have reason to fear, are perishing in your sins? Alas! respecting multitudes, I must say,

1. How awful are their delusions!

[All of these persons promise themselves impunity. One is too high to be called to account; another too low to attract the attention of the Deity. One is so immersed in business, that he may be well excused; and another too intelligent to be deceived: and all have an idea that God is too good and too merciful to proceed against them. But there is for every one of us a future state of retribution, when every one “shall receive at the hands of God according to what he has done in the body, whether it be good or evil.” If it were not so, we might adopt at once the Epicurean maxim, “Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die.” But “we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ,” and receive at his hands our doom in happiness or misery, to all eternity. Our foolish excuses will then avail us nothing. Our duty was plain; namely, to seek *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness:” but we chose to prefer other things before it, and to seek it *last*: we must therefore for ever lose the blessedness we would not seek, and endure for ever the misery which we would not deprecate. And, if men will not believe this now, they will surely be convinced at the very moment of their departure hence. Then “they will *know* whose word shall stand, whether God’s or theirs.” And then,]

2. How bitter will be their reflections—

[Let us suppose a man “lifting up his eyes in the torments of hell,” and looking back to the means of grace which he once enjoyed, and the offers of mercy that were made him in the Saviour’s name: how bitterly will he bewail his folly! how will he wish that he had been born a heathen, or an idiot; or rather, “that he had never been born at all!” We are told how such persons will be occupied in “weeping, and wailing, and gnashing their teeth,” with impotent rage against their God. And what will they then think of the gratifications for which they sacrificed all the felicity of heaven, and incurred all the miseries of hell? How will they stand amazed at their folly and their madness! and what language will they

^t Jer. ix. 1.

^u Jer. xlv. 28.

find sufficient to express their feelings of self-reproach? My dear brethren, I would that you would all place yourselves for a moment in the situation of a person at the first moment of his entering into the presence of his God; looking back upon the scenes which he has just left; and looking forward to the scenes on which he is about to enter, and which must continue without mitigation or end to all eternity. Could I prevail on you to realize for a moment that situation, methinks it would be impossible for you not to flee to the Saviour, and lay hold upon him, and cleave to him, till he had pardoned your offences, and spoken peace unto your souls.]

3. How infatuated must you be, if you will not improve your present opportunity of obtaining mercy!

[My dear brethren, in the name of Almighty God I declare to you, that if only you will come to him in humble dependence on the Saviour's merits, "not one of you shall ever be cast out." Nay, more; I declare, that God will seal his pardoning love upon your souls; so that, instead of wishing you had never been born, you shall be able, with most heartfelt delight, to say, "We thank thee, O God, for our *creation**." Yes, indeed: this is an expression which none but a true Christian can fully utter: for all others, whoever they may be, must feel some secret misgivings in relation to their eternal state. But the man who truly gives himself up to his God, can look forward to the eternal world with joy; knowing that he shall be received into the bosom of his Saviour, and reign with him in glory for evermore. Then I ask you, my brethren, Why will ye, after having lost so much time already, and having, for aught ye know, so little remaining to you, why, I say, will ye defer, even for an hour, that repentance which your state calls for, and that application to the Saviour which he is so ready to hear? Fain would I prevail upon you to go home and prostrate yourselves before the throne of grace, and to implore mercy of God in the Redeemer's name. If ye will not do this, what can be expected, but that the time shall come when you will curse the day of your birth, aye, and the day that ye ever heard this faithful address? I tremble to think what a swift witness I must be against those who shall still harden themselves against these faithful admonitions. I tremble to think how soon many of you will be found in that state, when it must be said of you, "It had been good for that man if he had not been born." But some of you at least, I hope, will take warning ere it be too late, and "lay hold on eternal life," before "the wrath of God shall come upon you to the uttermost."]

* See the General Thanksgiving.

MCCCCI.

THE LORD'S SUPPER.

Matt. xxvi. 29. *I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.*

THE great object for commemoration, under the Jewish dispensation, was, the redemption of that people out of Egypt: and that which ought to occupy our minds is, the infinitely greater redemption which has been vouchsafed to us, from all the miseries of death and hell, through the mediation of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The one was typical of the other, both in the means and in the end. The deliverance of the Jewish first-born from the sword of the destroying angel was effected by the blood of the Paschal lamb sprinkled on the doors and lintels of their houses; and that which we experience is through the blood of God's only dear Son, shed for us, and sprinkled on us. In remembrance of the former, the Passover was instituted, and the people ate the Paschal lamb: in remembrance of the latter, the Lord's Supper was instituted; and we receive the consecrated bread and wine as memorials of the body and blood of Christ. The latter of these ordinances supersedes the former; and will itself continue to the end of time in remembrance of our Redeemer's death. To enter fully into the passage before us, we must notice the Lord's Supper,

I. As instituted by Christ—

It was instituted at the close of the Paschal Feast, and with a special reference to the circumstances with which that ordinance was administered. But, without entering into minute particulars, which we have only on the authority of Jewish Rabbins, and which are more curious than useful, we may observe, that this Supper was instituted,

1. As a commemorative sign—

[Our blessed Lord was just about to suffer and to die for the sins of men. In order, therefore, that this mystery might

never be forgotten, he brake the bread, in token of "his body given for men;" and poured out the wine, in token of "his blood shed for them;" and expressly commanded, that in all future ages this ceremony should be observed "in remembrance of him^a." It was to be a "shewing forth of his death till he should come again" at the end of the world, to take all his redeemed people to himself^b. The one great end for which he died was also in this way to be made known to all succeeding generations. The redemption of mankind was the subject of a covenant entered into between the Father and the Son; the Son engaging to make his soul an offering for sin; and the Father engaging, that, when this should be effected, his Son should see a seed who should prolong their days; and the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hands; yea, "he should see of the travail of his soul, and should be satisfied^c." By the shedding of Christ's blood this covenant was ratified; and the cup which was administered in remembrance of it, was to be to all mankind a memorial, that, on the Redeemer's part, every thing was effected for the salvation of men, and that all who would embrace the covenant so ratified should assuredly be saved. "The cup was the New Testament in his blood;" or, in other words, it represented the new covenant which that blood had both ratified and sealed.]

2. As an instructive emblem—

[The killing of the Paschal lamb was not sufficient: the people must feed upon it, in the manner which God himself had prescribed. So neither is it sufficient that by the breaking of the bread, and the pouring out of the wine, we commemorate the death of Christ. Were the ordinance *merely commemorative*, that would have answered the end: but it is intended emblematically to shew forth the way in which we are to obtain an interest in the Redeemer's death. We must apply it, every one of us, to ourselves: we must feed upon it; and by so doing declare our affiance in it: we must shew, that, as our bodies are nourished by bread and wine, so we hope to have our souls nourished by means of union and communion with our blessed and adorable Redeemer. Hence the command given to every one, to eat the bread, and to drink the cup. And a more instructive ordinance cannot be conceived; since it shews, that it is by an actual fellowship with Christ in his death, and by that alone, that we can ever become partakers of the benefits which it has procured for us.]

But my text leads me to notice the Lord's Supper more particularly,

II. As still honoured with his peculiar presence—

^a ver. 19.

^b 1 Cor. xi. 26.

^c Isai. liii. 10, 11.

When our blessed Lord said that "he would no more drink of the fruit of the vine, till he should drink it new with his Disciples in the kingdom of God," he intimated, that there was to be at least some period when he would again hold communion with them in that blessed ordinance. In his life-time he did not: for, on the very day after he had instituted it, he was put to death. Nor did he at any time during the forty days of his continuance on earth, after his resurrection. For, though it is true that "he ate and drank with his Disciples after he was risen from the dead^d," yet he never again partook of the Passover, or of the Lord's Supper; but merely ate and drank, in order to shew that he was not a Spirit only, but that he possessed a body that was capable of performing all the proper functions of the body. Nevertheless, he had, and ever will have, communion with his people in that ordinance; for he has said, "Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them:" and again; "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world."

His kingdom, properly speaking, is now come—

[The Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testament, continually represent the Christian dispensation as the establishment of the Messiah's kingdom upon earth. This kingdom is called "the kingdom of God;" and it is that which the Father establishes, through the agency of the Holy Ghost. And this is the kingdom spoken of in my text: for, when Christ had accomplished the redemption of the world by his death and resurrection, then was all that had been typified in the redemption from Egypt, all that had been prefigured in the Paschal feast, and all that was shadowed forth in the Supper of the Lord, "fulfilled^e:" and, consequently, the time was come for the renewed manifestations of his presence in this sacred ordinance. True, indeed, *corporeally* he appears amongst us no more: but *spiritually* he does; and, according to his promise, "he comes to us and makes his abode with us^f," and "supps with us^g."]

Now, therefore, does he execute what he gave us reason to expect—

^d Acts x. 41.

^e Luke xxii. 16, 18.

^f John xiv. 21, 23.

^g Rev. iii. 20.

[He truly, though spiritually, feasts with us, when we are assembled around the table of the Lord. It was not only because of the command that the ordinance should be observed, but on account of the blessing which they obtained in the administration of it, that the first Christians observed it *every day*^h, and for ages continued the observance of it on the Sabbath-dayⁱ. And, though I am not aware of any express promise of a more than ordinary manifestation of the Saviour's presence in that sacred ordinance, yet I believe that he does seal it with a peculiar blessing: and I will venture to appeal to the experience of many before me, whether he does not then more particularly "draw nigh to those who there draw nigh to him"^k; and whether he has not again and again, in a more abundant measure, "made himself known to them in the breaking of bread^l?" I think that of spiritual worshippers, there are few who will not attest the truth of these remarks.]

But we shall not have a just view of the Lord's Supper, unless we contemplate it,

III. As realized and completed in the eternal world—

Then will the whole mystery of redemption be complete; and then will the kingdom of the Messiah, which is now established upon earth, "be delivered up to God, even the Father, that God may be all in all^m."

Then shall we *spiritually* renew this feast—

[Of that time our Saviour spake, when he said, "I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israelⁿ." There we read, that "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are sitting at the table," with all the myriads of the redeemed^o; and there is Lazarus leaning on his bosom^p, exactly as John leaned on the bosom of the Lord Jesus at the Paschal feast, when this Supper was instituted^q. There shall all the redeemed of the Lord be in due time assembled; and there will the great work of redemption occupy all their minds, precisely as it does when we surround the table of the Lord. There, at this moment, they are "singing a *new* song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood,

^h Acts ii. 42, 46.

ⁱ Acts xx. 7.

^k Jam. iv. 8.

^l Luke xxiv. 35.

^m 1 Cor. xv. 24, 28.

ⁿ Luke xxii. 29, 30.

^o Matt. viii. 11.

^p Luke xvi. 23.

^q John xiii. 23, 25. and xxi. 20.

out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth^r." This, by its reference to the redemption of the world, may well be called "The Song of Moses and of the Lamb^s;" and to all eternity will "this wine be new" to those who drink it; the wonders of redeeming love being more and more unfolded to every admiring and adoring soul.]

And will the Lord Jesus Christ partake of it with us?

[Yes, he will: "The very Lamb of God himself, who is in the midst of the throne, will feed us, and lead us unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes^t." Did he break the bread, and administer the cup to his Disciples when on earth? So will he at the feast in heaven: as he himself has said, 'He will gird himself, and make us sit down to meat, and himself come forth and serve us^u.'" It is indeed but little that we know of the heavenly world; but this, at all events, we may say: He will appear there as "a Lamb that has been slain^x;" and under this character will he be the light, the joy, the glory of all the hosts of heaven^y, administering to all, and glorified in all^z.]

Upon this subject I would ground the following

ADVICE :

1. Get just views of this ordinance—

[Respecting those who profane it, as a mere qualification for civil offices, I say nothing. I leave them to God and their own consciences. They may be well assured I can say nothing in their favour: nor do I think that it is a light account which they have to give to Him who appointed the ordinance for other ends, which, alas! they altogether overlook. But there are two mistakes which I would endeavour to rectify; the one is, that the ordinance, *as an act*, recommends us to God; and the other is, that no one should venture to observe the ordinance till he has made attainments of the highest order in religion: the one of these errors leads to the indulgence of self-righteous hopes; the other operates to the production of slavish fears. Respecting the sanctity of the ordinance, I would not say a word that should diminish the apprehension of it in the mind of any human being. But we should remember what it is, and for what end it was appointed. It is precisely what the Paschal feast was: and as every child of Abraham partook of that, so should every one who truly believes in Christ partake of this. And, in fact, the whole body of Christians did, for

^r Rev. v. 9, 10.

^s Rev. xv. 3.

^t Rev. vii. 17.

^u Luke xii. 37.

^x Rev. v. 6.

^y Rev. xxi. 23.

^z 2 Thess. i. 10.

many ages, observe it. No one felt himself at liberty to neglect it: nor would any man have been accounted a Christian, indeed, if he had neglected it. This then shews, that none who desire to serve and honour God should abstain from it. They should come to it, to express their gratitude to the Lord Jesus for what he has done for them, and to obtain fresh supplies of grace and peace at his hands. Yet no one should think that the performance of this duty has any such charm in it, as to recommend him to God, and to conciliate the Divine favour. It is Christ alone that can save us: and, whether we seek him in this or any other ordinance, it is He alone that can reconcile us to God. It is not the *act* of praying, or the *act* of communicating at his table, that can form any legitimate ground of hope: it is on Christ, as apprehended by faith, that we must rely; and it is only so far as we exercise a simple faith on him, that we can justly hope for acceptance with our God. Let the ordinance, then, be viewed aright. It is a memorial of the death of Christ, and a medium of communion with Christ, whose body and blood we feed upon in the sacred elements, and by whom we are strengthened for all holy obedience. Let the ordinance be observed in this way, and we shall find it a good preparative for heaven, yea, and an earnest and foretaste of heaven itself.]

2. Seek to realize the great truths declared in it—

[Here you behold Christ giving himself for you. In the bread broken, and the wine poured forth, you behold his agonies even unto death, even those agonies which have expiated your guilt, and obtained the remission of your sins. O let the sight fill you with holy joy and gratitude; and let it encourage your access to God, even though you had a thousand times greater guilt upon you than ever was contracted by any child of man! The death of Christ was a propitiation for the sins of the whole world: and if every sinner in the universe would look to him, it would suffice to conciliate the Divine favour in his behalf, and to save them all, without exception. In a full confidence of this, take the sacred elements within your lips, and expect from God all those blessings which his dear Son has purchased for you — — —]

3. Look forward to the feast prepared for you in heaven—

[Soon, very soon, shall you be called to “the supper of the Lamb in heaven,” and there see the Redeemer and his redeemed all feasting together in endless bliss. May we not well say, “Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of our God?” Anticipate, then, this blessed day. Watch

^a Luke xiv. 15.

and wait for your summons hence : survey the glories that shall then encompass you on every side : and let it be your one endeavour now to get "the wedding garment," that shall qualify you to be acceptable guests at that table. Remember, that "Christ, our passover, is sacrificed for us^b." Remember that even in this world it is your privilege to "keep the feast" from day to day. And be assured, that the more constantly and entirely you feed on Christ below, the better shall you be prepared for the nearest intercourse with him above, and the fullest possible communication of all his blessings to your souls.]

^b 1 Cor. v. 7.

MCCCCII.

CHRIST'S APPREHENSION.

Matt. xxvi. 53, 54. *Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?*

THE Christian is by profession a soldier : he is to fight a good fight, and to war a good warfare : he is not for one moment to lay aside his armour, or to make a truce with his enemies : nor is he to be satisfied with defensive operations ; he must carry the war into the heart of the enemy's country, and attack his strong-holds : whenever he gains a victory, he must exercise no lenity ; he must not spare one single foe ; he must extirpate all without exception and without mercy : he must "hew Agag in pieces before the Lord." But "the weapons of his warfare are not carnal : " his armour, whether for defence or assault, is all of heavenly temper ; it is "the armour of God," in which he is clothed ; and "the sword of the Spirit," with which he attacks his enemies. If he be combating with a persecuting world, then especially must he be armed with love and patience. These indeed are not arms suited to our sinful nature : the fierce and vindictive tempers of men would lead them rather to repel force by force, as Peter attempted to do in defence of his Master. But Christianity disclaims such aid : it is neither to be propagated nor

maintained by such means. Our Lord has declared that “they who take the sword shall perish with the sword:” and has shewn us, by his own example, that we are rather to “possess our souls in patience;” and to conquer, not by shedding the blood of others, but by suffering our own to be poured forth with meekness and resignation.

These observations naturally arise from the reproof which our Lord gave to Peter, when, with well-meant, but unhallowed zeal, he had attempted to withstand his enemies with the sword. Our Lord tells him that such exertions were both unlawful and unnecessary: they were unlawful, because they were quite contrary to the spirit of his religion; and unnecessary, because, if he judged it expedient, he could in one moment have legions of angels sent to rescue him from their hands. But as, for the exemplifying of his religion, he forbade his disciples to fight; so, for the fulfilling of the Scriptures, he forbore to deliver himself, though he might have done it in a way that was both easy and legitimate.

We propose to shew you,

I. How easily our Lord could have rescued himself from their hands—

God has been pleased on many occasions to effect his purposes by the ministration of angels—

[Angels have been employed by him sometimes for the destruction of men, and sometimes for their preservation: and in either case they have always proved mighty and irresistible.

By the sword of an angel God destroyed the Egyptian first-born both of man and beast^a. By an angel he smote seventy thousand of David's subjects, for the pride and creature-confidence which he manifested in numbering the people^b. By an angel he slew an hundred and eighty-five thousand of Sennacherib's army in one single night^c.

Nor have angels proved less mighty to save than to destroy. The Hebrew Youths were kept unhurt in the fiery furnace^d:

^a Numb. xx. 16. with Exod. xii. 23. Where the Lord who protected Israel is distinguished from “the destroyer” who smote the Egyptians.

^b 2 Sam. xxiv. 16.

^c Isai. xxxvii. 36.

^d Dan. iii. 28.

Daniel was preserved in a den of hungry lions^e: the twelve Apostles were brought forth from a prison to which they had been committed^f: and Peter, when chained and guarded in an inner prison with all imaginable care and safety, was, on the very night previous to his intended execution, liberated from his dungeon, and restored to the embraces of his praying friends^g. These things are effected by the ministration of angels "who excel in strength."]

Of these our blessed Lord might have had any number to deliver him—

[He had given abundant proof indeed that he could, if he pleased, deliver himself: for on former occasions he had repeatedly withdrawn himself from his enemies, when they thought they had him in their power^h; and, but a few minutes before, he had beaten them all to the ground by a wordⁱ, shewing thereby that he could as easily have struck them dead, after the manner in which the armed bands were smitten when they were sent to apprehend Elijah^k. But, if he had needed assistance, he could have had legions of angels for his support. He needed only to ask of his Father, and it would be done: above seventy thousand of those powerful beings^l would be with him in an instant: and if one single angel was sufficient to destroy a hundred and eighty-five thousand warriors in a single night, what could not such a host of them effect, if he chose to employ them in his service?]

If then to deliver himself would have been so easy, it will be proper to inquire,

II. Why he forbore to do so—

The Scriptures had spoken much respecting the Messiah—

[They contained not only many predictions relative to his death in general, but some which referred to the very circumstances in which he was now placed. It had been foretold, that he should be assaulted by a tumultuous mob, composed of Jews and Gentiles^m, rich and poorⁿ: that he should be betrayed into their hands by one of his own Disciples^o: that he should give himself up to them, when he had power to

^e Dan. vi. 22.

^f Acts v. 19.

^g Acts xii. 8—10.

^h Luke iv. 29, 30. John viii. 59.

ⁱ John xviii. 6.

^k 2 Kings i. 10, 12.

^l Computing a legion at six thousand, "twelve legions" would be seventy-two thousand.

^m Ps. ii. 1—3.

ⁿ Ps. xxii. 12, 16.

^o Ps. xli. 9. and lv. 12, 13. with John xiii. 18.

deliver himself from them^p: that, instead of resisting them in any respect, he should go like a lamb to the slaughter^q: and that his Disciples, offended at his apparent weakness, should forsake him^r.

Now if these Scriptures were not fulfilled, one essential circumstance would be wanting to prove his divine mission — — — Moreover, if he should persist in withstanding the malice of his enemies, the eternal purposes of his Father would be frustrated; the very ends for which he had become incarnate would be defeated; and the whole world would be left to perish, notwithstanding all he had both done and suffered for their salvation — — — But these evils greater in our Lord's estimation than ten thousand deaths; and therefore he would not for one moment delay the accomplishment of these Scriptures, when once the proper season for it had arrived.]

On this subject we may ground some profitable
OBSERVATIONS :

1. We can be in no trouble, from whence the voice of prayer cannot extricate us—

[Prayer, if it accord with the will and purpose of Jehovah, shall prevail as much for us, as ever it prevailed for any of the saints of old. However imminent our danger be, or however desperate our condition, the pursuing foe shall be diverted from his purpose^s, or the voracious whale be forced to disgorge his prey upon the dry land^t. Prayer should, if necessary, bring all the angels in heaven to our support. Prayer is, in a sense, omnipotent; for it interests the Almighty God in our behalf. O let us have worthy thoughts of the power and efficacy of prayer! And if Satan tempt us at any time to give up the contest, let us reprove him in the words of our Lord, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he will send me more than twelve legions of angels" to defeat thy malice?]

2. We should be contented to go to heaven in the way that God has marked out for us—

[Our frail nature is fond of ease. But soldiers are called to endure hardships: and this is the path marked out for us; it is "through much tribulation that we are to enter into the kingdom of heaven." In this way our Lord himself walked: "though he was a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered," and was at last "made perfect through sufferings." In these things he was our example, whose steps

^p Isai. l. 5, 6.

^r Zech. xiii. 7. with Matt. xxvi. 31.

^t Jonah ii. 10.

^q Isai. liii. 7.

^s 1 Pet. ii. 19—23.

we are to follow^u. Who are we then that we should be exempt from trials? If we were to consider them as punishments, they are infinitely lighter than what we deserve: but if we consider them as a furnace to purify us from our dross, and as an honour conferred upon us to render us conformed to our Saviour's image, methinks we should not withdraw ourselves from them, even if we had it in our power; but be incomparably more desirous of acquiring benefit to our souls than of enjoying any present ease in our bodies.]

3. Our Lord's solicitude about the fulfilment of the Scriptures in things relating to his sufferings, is a pledge to us, that he will be no less anxious about their accomplishment in what relates to the salvation of his people.

[There are "exceeding great and precious promises" given to the people of God. Our Lord himself has assured us that "none shall ever pluck us out of his hand;" that "no weapon formed against us shall ever prosper;" and that "Satan himself shall be bruised under our feet shortly." Now these "Scriptures cannot be broken;" "nor can one jot or tittle of them fail." We have a security for the accomplishment of them, not only in the veracity of God, but also in the government which Christ exercises over the world at large, and his Church in particular. "All things both in heaven and in earth are committed unto him;" and all the hosts of heaven are at his disposal. Will not he then be jealous for his own honour? Will not he who shuddered so at the thought of the Scriptures failing of their accomplishment in his own case, be equally anxious for the fulfilment of them in ours? Let us then humbly commit ourselves to him, assured that, however our enemies may appear to triumph for a time, they shall all be vanquished at last; and that, "having suffered with Christ, we shall also be glorified together."]

^u 1 Pet. ii. 21.

MCCCCIII.

CHRIST FORSAKEN BY HIS DISCIPLES.

Matt. xxvi. 56. *Then all the Disciples forsook him, and fled.*

NEXT to the presence of God, there is nothing so comforting in affliction as the sympathy of friends. The kind offices of those we love afford us tenfold pleasure in those seasons when trouble has depressed

our spirits. On the other hand, the unkindness of professed friends is a most painful aggravation of any sorrow which we may be called to endure. The accumulated losses of Job were sustained by him with a holy fortitude and resignation: but, when he found that he was forsaken by his dearest friends, and that they from whom he might have expected pity became his vehement accusers^a, he could no longer suppress the painful feelings of his mind. It must also have been a bitter ingredient in our Saviour's cup, that in the hour of his extremity he was abandoned by his own disciples, who were bound by every tie to follow him even unto death. We cannot even read the record in our text without a mixture of indignation and grief. It forces however upon our minds many profitable reflections, some of which will serve as the basis of our present discourse.

I. How weak is the resolution of fallen man !

[Man, as originally formed by God, was capable of carrying into execution whatever his judgment approved or his will decreed: but it is far otherwise with us in our present state. Any one who had heard the firmness with which the Disciples expressed their determination to cleave unto their Lord, and "to die with him rather than deny him," would have supposed it impossible that their resolution should be shaken. But behold, in the time of trial they all forgot their vows, and fled from him with precipitation and terror. The intrepid Peter, the beloved John, the bold and ambitious James^b, are weak as the rest of their brethren.

The resolutions which we also form on particular occasions appear immoveable. How earnest are many, when lying on a bed of sickness, to redeem their time; and how determined, if ever they should recover, to devote the remainder of their lives to God! — — — Yet they are no sooner restored to health than they go back to their former habits and companions, and leave to a distant period the performance of their vows — — — It is thus also with many after an awakening discourse: they see how vain it is to render unto God a mere formal or hypocritical service; and they resolve that henceforth they will offer him an undivided heart — — — But their hearts are not steadfast in the covenant which they make; and their lives are little else than a series of reformations and declensions without any solid improvement in the divine life — — —]

^a Job xix. 13, 14.

^b Mark x. 38, 39.

II. What great evils are even good men capable of committing!

[That the Disciples were good men is certain; for our Lord himself had recently testified, that "they were clean through the word which he had spoken to them." But their conduct on this occasion was most base and shameful. What *ingratitude* were they guilty of in forsaking their Lord, when their presence might perhaps be of most essential service to him! Jesus had conferred innumerable benefits on them: and it was for them that he had exposed himself to these cruel persecutions. Yet how do they requite his kindness? They have a peculiar opportunity to render him most essential service. From their long and constant attendance on him, they above all were qualified to answer any accusations which might be brought against him; and by their united testimony might perhaps prevail against the clamours of his enemies: but they, occupied only about their own safety, refuse him the important aid which they were able to afford, and leave him unprotected in the hands of his bloody-thirsty enemies.

The *unbelief* also which they manifested on this occasion was highly criminal. They had been repeatedly told by Jesus that, after his death and resurrection, he would meet them in Galilee. *This* was equal to a promise on his part that they should be preserved. Moreover, at the very time when he was apprehended, he said in their hearing, "If ye seek me, let these go their way." *This* ought to have been regarded by them as a certain pledge of their security. But so completely were they overcome by fear, that they could not think of safety but in flight.

We mention not these things to make any man think lightly of sin. Sin is a dreadful evil, in whomsoever it is found; but most of all in those who profess godliness. And we notice it in the Disciples, only that we may put all persons on their guard against it — — — and to make them sensible to whom they are indebted for the measure of steadfastness they have hitherto been enabled to maintain — — —]

III. How desirable is it to have just views of Jesus Christ!

[Our blessed Lord forewarned his Disciples that their desertion of him would originate in their misconception of his character and office: "All ye shall be offended in me this night." They had seen their Divine Master controlling the very elements themselves: from whence they had concluded him to be the true Messiah. But, now they behold him bound, and led away by an armed band, they begin to think that all their former notions were false, and that the expecta-

tions which they had founded on his numerous miracles were delusive. Jesus seemed to them now to be like Samson after his locks were cut: he was become weak as other men. Hence they could no longer repose any confidence in him, but fled like sheep without a shepherd.

And is it not thus with the ungodly? Wherefore do they despise Jesus, but because they know neither his power nor his grace? — — — Must we not trace to the same source also the desponding fears of the contrite? Surely, if they knew how able and willing Jesus is to save them to the uttermost, they would commit their souls to him without doubt or fear — — — We may add also, respecting the godly themselves, that if they had brighter discoveries of his glory and excellency, they would be more ardent in their love to him, and more diligent in his service — — — We may say of all, as of those who crucified our Lord, that “had they known him (more thoroughly), they would not have acted thus and thus towards him.”]

From these reflections we shall be naturally led to
SUGGEST a word of,

1. Warning—

[Some take up a profession of religion hastily, because they do not expect persecution, and others because they do not fear it. But it becomes us to guard against inadvertence on the one hand, and self-confidence on the other. Let not any imagine, that it is an easy thing to be a Christian; or that they can follow Christ aright without having a cross to bear. We must all, in some measure at least, “drink of the cup that our Divine Master drank of, and be baptized with the baptism that he was baptized with:” and therefore we should “prepare our hearts for temptation.” *To every one, therefore, that desires to be a Christian*, we would say, “COUNT THE COST;” “lest after having begun to build, you be not able to finish.” *To those who are bold and confident in their profession*, our warning must bear a different aspect: “BE NOT HIGH-MINDED, BUT FEAR.” Surely when we behold all the Disciples, after such vehement protestations of fidelity, forsaking their Lord in his utmost extremity, we have reason enough to be “jealous over ourselves with a godly jealousy.” While we “think we are standing firm, we should take heed lest we fall.” We should maintain in our minds a constant sense of our proneness to sin; and cry daily and hourly to God, “Hold up my going in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not.”]

2. Encouragement—

[The failure of such persons as our Lord’s Disciples might well cause us to despond, if we had not a firmer foundation to

build upon than any resolution of our own. But we have the word and oath of Jehovah for our support: he has said, "I will never leave thee, never, never forsake thee." This promise was fulfilled to our blessed Saviour, when he was deserted by all his friends^c. It was accomplished also on behalf of the Apostle Paul, when he was in circumstances nearly similar^d. And we also are warranted to expect the same Divine aid and consolation, whenever our necessities peculiarly require it^e. Let us then, whilst we are weak in ourselves, "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." Only let our trust be in HIM; and then we need "not fear, though an host should encamp against us," or though earth and hell should conspire to destroy us. "The grace of Christ shall be sufficient for us," "nor shall any thing prevail to separate us from his love."]

^c John xvi. 32.^d 2 Tim. iv. 16, 17.^e Isai. xliii. 2.

MCCCCIV.

OUR LORD'S CONDEMNATION BY THE JEWISH COUNCIL.

Matt. xxvi. 63—66. *And the high-priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high-priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death.*

THE ungodly in their pursuits often manifest a diligence which may put to shame the lukewarmness of God's most zealous servants. Nor is it only in the gratification of their lusts that they display this ardour, but in their opposition to what is good. They feel themselves reprov'd by the blameless conversation of others, and would therefore gladly bring down all to their own level. Striking is that declaration of Solomon; "They sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall^a." We have an awful illustration of this in the conduct of the Jewish governors towards

^a Prov. iv. 16.

our blessed Lord at all times, but especially at the close of his life. The high-priest and Scribes and elders had been occupied in examining witnesses against our Lord till midnight: yet, apprehensive that they had not gained such information as would warrant them to condemn him, they assembled, even the whole Sanhedrim, *as soon as it was day*^b, in the palace of the high-priest; and prosecuted their inquiries with redoubled earnestness, in order that they might effect his destruction without delay. The particular circumstances here recorded shall be noticed by us,

I. In a way of easy illustration—

In this trial of our Lord there are three things that require our attention;

1. His examination—

[His enemies had endeavoured to substantiate something against him by means of witnesses, but were defeated by the discordance of their testimony. The high-priest, therefore, had recourse to a method which his office authorized^c, and from which he had little doubt of success; he adjured his prisoner, in the name of the living God, to declare the truth upon oath, and either to avow openly, or plainly to disavow, his pretensions to the office of their Messiah. Now if this had been done in a spirit of candour, and with a sincere desire of ascertaining the truth, we think he would have been fully justified in resorting to the measure: for the question was of infinite importance to the whole nation, inasmuch as their everlasting salvation depended on their receiving him if he were indeed the Messiah, and rejecting him if he were an impostor. The honour of God also was deeply implicated in it: and therefore it was right that he should exert his judicial authority to have the matter, which had so long agitated the nation, brought to a decision. But there was in the mind of the judge a pre-determination to condemn him: and the adjuration had no other object than that of gaining from the mouth of our Lord himself a plea for effecting his destruction. And it is precisely thus that the inquiries of many about religion are made, not so much with a view to obtain useful information, as for the finding occasion against the Gospel, and against those who profess it.]

2. His confession—

[Whilst the people clamorously brought all kinds of accusations against him, our Lord held his peace; but when the

^b Luke xxii. 66.

^c Numb. v. 19—21.

high-priest adjured him in the name of the living God, he could no longer keep silence; but plainly and unequivocally said, "I am" the Christ; "I am" the Son of God^d. But, to cut off occasion from those who sought occasion against him, he brought to their remembrance a portion of Holy Writ, with which they were well acquainted, and which they were expecting about that time to be fulfilled^e. It was universally known that Daniel spake of the Messiah; and that "the Son of Man" should establish an universal kingdom: and our Lord warns his enemies, that however they might despise him on account of the meanness of his present appearance, they should one day "see him coming in the clouds of heaven," not only to punish Jerusalem, but to judge the world. This should have put them on their guard at least, and prevented that precipitate judgment which they were about to form: but the Scripture has no weight with men who are filled with prejudice; or rather, an appeal to it does but irritate them the more, and render them willing, though unconscious, instruments of fulfilling its predictions.]

3. His sentence—

[No sooner was this confession uttered, than the high-priest, to testify his abhorrence of what he called blasphemy, rent his clothes. This, though a common way of expressing grief or indignation among the Jews, was forbidden to the high-priest, whose august character was supposed to render him superior to all such transports of passion^f. But, on this occasion, he who should have inclined to mercy was the first to condemn the prisoner, and to stir up the whole court against him. Little consideration is wanted, when religion is to be opposed: clamour will easily supply the want of argument, and prejudice supersede the necessity of proof: hence his assessors in judgment instantly adopted his sentiments; and all condemned Jesus, as a blasphemer, to suffer death. How awful to behold a number of persons, possessed both of the magisterial and sacerdotal office, branding as a blasphemer God's only begotten Son, and, with malice truly diabolical, exclaiming, "He is guilty of death!" What must the heavenly hosts have felt, if they were spectators of this transaction! and how ought *we* to feel, when we consider, that we bear about with us the same evil dispositions, and, unless restrained by grace, should be as ready as they to renew the same scenes. We may imagine indeed, that the peculiarity of their situation led them to wickedness which we are incapable of committing: but it is a certain truth, that we in like circumstances should

^d See Mark xiv. 62.

^e Dan. vii. 13, 14.

^f Compare 2 Kings xviii. 37. and xix. 1. with Lev. xxi. 10.

act as they did, if God did not interpose to enlighten and restrain our minds. The haste and acrimony with which godly persons are calumniated amongst us, shew clearly that we are actuated by the same principles as the Jews were, and, as far as occasion is afforded, are ready to tread in their steps.]

Let us next advert to the history,

II. In a way of spiritual improvement—

In this view much instruction may be gathered from it. We may learn from it,

1. To inquire after Christ—

[With what earnestness did the high-priest and elders pursue their inquiries; depriving themselves even of their rest, in order to acquire the information they desired! And are not *we* equally interested in the inquiry, “Whether he be the Christ, the Son of God?” Should we be content to take this matter upon trust, and not inquire into the grounds on which it stands, and the evidences which are adduced in its support? Or, having ascertained the truth of his Messiahship, should we not examine into the nature of his work, and office, and character? In our spirit, indeed, we cannot too widely differ from the Jews; but in our zeal and diligence we may well propose them to ourselves as objects of imitation. For what is there in the whole world that deserves our attention in comparison of this? St. Paul “accounted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord.” Nor let us imagine that the study of the Holy Scriptures is to be confined to ministers: it is a work equally necessary for all, though all cannot devote the same portion of their time to it. And it is a work to which all are competent, as far as is necessary for their spiritual instruction. To all then would I say, “Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of Christ.”]

2. To trust in him—

[When we see our Lord sentenced to death without any fault whatever having been found in him, then we see what is to be our plea at the bar of judgment. This very circumstance of his having been condemned without cause frees us from condemnation. Having no sins of his own, his death was an expiation for our sin; and shall become effectual for the salvation of all who trust in him. To this agree the words of St. Peter: “Christ once suffered for sins, *the just for the unjust*, that he might bring us to God.” Hence, whilst we confess ourselves to have deserved the deepest condemnation, we may point to him as our Surety and Substitute; and may say with the prophet, “He was wounded for *our* transgressions, and

bruised for *our* iniquities; the chastisement of *our* peace was upon him, and by his stripes *we* are healed." O that we may never lose sight of this blessed truth, which is the hope of all the ends of the earth! Let us contemplate it; let us glory in it; let it be the one labour of our souls to "live by faith in him, and to say continually, He hath loved ME, and given himself for ME^g."]

3. To confess him openly—

[Our Lord well knew what would be the consequence of the confession that he made; yet would he not conceal the truth: and shall we be afraid to confess HIM? When he was not deterred by the most cruel death, shall we be intimidated by a reproachful name? Shall we not rather glory in being counted worthy to suffer shame for his sake? Yes: let us take up our cross cheerfully, and "follow him without the camp, bearing his reproach." If persecution should menace us with its severest penalties, let us be ready to answer with the holy Apostle, "None of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I may but finish my course with joy," and fulfil my duty to my Lord. Let us remember, that as *he* "endured the cross, and despised the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the Majesty on high," so shall we also, "having overcome, be seated with him on his throne, as he sitteth on his Father's throne."]

4. Look forward to his second coming—

[Ere long he will surely come again, according to his word; and "every eye shall see him, and they also who pierced him." But with what eyes will his enemies behold him then! How glad would they then be, if they could hide themselves from his presence under rocks and mountains! Not so his believing people: *they* will rejoice and welcome his arrival as the commencement and consummation of all their joys. Thus saith the prophet: "Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his word; your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed^h." And to the same effect, only in far more awful language, is the testimony of the Apostle Paulⁱ: "It is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled, rest," &c. &c. Look forward then, I say, to that day; remembering, that tribulation is the way to the kingdom, and that "all who have been partakers of his sufferings now, shall, when his glory shall be revealed, be glad before him with exceeding joy^k." "Having suffered with him, ye shall also be eternally glorified together^l."]

^g Gal. ii. 20.

^h Isai. lxvi. 5.

ⁱ 2 Thess. i. 6—10.

^k 1 Pet. iv. 13.

^l Rom. viii. 17.

2 Tim. ii. 12.

MCCCCV.

THE INDIGNITIES OFFERED TO CHRIST IN THE PALACE OF
THE HIGH PRIEST.

Matt. xxvi. 67, 68. *Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands, saying, Prophesy unto us, thou Christ; who is he that smote thee?*

THE sufferings of our blessed Lord were not confined to the garden or the cross; but were continued through all the intervening period without intermission. Those which he experienced immediately after his condemnation by the Sanhedrim, may be considered in a twofold view;

I. As inflicted on him—

We cannot read the account given us by the different Evangelists, without being filled with utter astonishment at,

1. The impiety of his persecutors—

[In every civilized state condemned criminals are held as objects of compassion: when once the law is put in force against them, they are treated at least with outward decorum and respect; and every one would wish rather to alleviate, than to aggravate, their sorrows. But in the servants of the high-priest, if not in some of the Council also, we beheld the most savage barbarity, and the most *wanton cruelty*. To spit in the face of a person was the greatest indignity that could be offered him: and to pluck off his beard by force, must needs be attended with excruciating pain. Yet in this way, together with blows, did they insult and torment the victim of their malice.

To this cruelty they added the most *horrid blasphemy*. Our Lord was known to have professed himself the Christ; and to have shewn himself “a Prophet, mighty in words and deeds.” But they made the very offices which he sustained for our salvation a subject of profane derision: they blindfolded him, and then smote him with canes, and with the palms of their hands, saying unto him, “Prophesy unto us, thou Christ; Who is he that smote thee?” They had accused him of blasphemy: but another evangelist justly retorts the charge; and says, in reference to their present conduct, “Many other things blasphemously spake they against him.”

Who would have conceived that human nature should be capable of such atrocities?]

2. The meekness and gentleness of Christ—

[We are told in the foregoing verses, that “Jesus held his peace” amidst all the accusations of his enemies. The same conduct he observed under the aggravated trials that he now endured. Not an angry or vindictive word escaped his lips. How justly might he have vindicated his Divine character, by striking dead upon the spot the persons who so wantonly abused him! He might at least have dwelt more largely on the hint which he had suggested, when adjured by the high-priest to declare his real character^a; and might have told them how he would resent and punish their impieties when they should stand before his tribunal. It might indeed be supposed that he uttered many things which are not recorded in this brief history; but, whatever he might say or do on other occasions, we are sure that, during the whole scene of his last sufferings, “when he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.”]

But these indignities are to be considered in another view, namely,

II. As bearing testimony to him—

The general agreement between our Lord’s character and the prophecies concerning him, is a convincing evidence of his Messiahship—

[The circumstances which were foretold respecting him were so numerous, so minute, so improbable, and so contradictory, (if we may so speak,) that no one could have ventured to predict such things respecting an impostor; nor could they have been fulfilled in him by chance. None but God, who ordereth all things according to the counsel of his own will, could have foreseen them, or have secured their accomplishment: and therefore the things, so foreseen, and so accomplished, infallibly testify, that the person in whom they were accomplished was indeed the Christ — —]

In these sufferings more especially we see a confirmation of all his pretensions and professions—

[His trials, and his behaviour under them, were both subjects of prophecy. Let Micah tell us how the Messiah was to be treated: “They shall smite the Judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek^b.” Let Isaiah describe his conduct under that and various other indignities: “He gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; he

^a ver. 64.

^b Mic. v. 1.

hid not his face from shame and spitting^c." With these lights let me go and search for the Messiah. Where shall I find him? I go into the high-priest's palace: I descend into the hall among the servants; there I see the indignities offered to the despised Nazarene: I behold him smitten on the face with sticks, as well as with the palms of their hands^d: I see the inhuman wretches spitting in his face; whilst he endures all his sufferings with invincible patience. There, therefore, I recognize the Messiah, the Saviour of the world; and falling down before him, I exclaim with Thomas, "My Lord, and my God!"

In this history we BEHOLD, as in a glass,

1. How Christ is yet treated by an ungodly world—

[It is not any longer in the power of any to offer him the same personal insults that are recorded in the text: but as they who live in sin are said to "crucify the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame," so may they with equal justice be said to "spit in his face and buffet him:" and, while they imagine that he neither regards nor notices their impieties, they do in fact repeat the blasphemies of those who smote him, and say, "Prophecy unto us, thou Christ; Who is he that smote thee?" Let then the indignation which we feel against that blasphemous and inhuman rabble, be turned against ourselves: for, as often as we have violated his laws, and encouraged ourselves with hopes of impunity in sin, we have renewed the transactions of that awful day: and we have even more need to humble ourselves than they, inasmuch as we have professed to acknowledge him as our Saviour, whereas they really thought him an impostor, who deserved all that they inflicted on him.]

2. How his disciples must expect to be treated—

["The servant must not expect to be above his Lord: if they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household." Indeed, as in the case before us, the very name by which God himself has designated them is used against them in a way of profane derision, and made a term of the most malignant reproach. We appeal to all, whether the children of God are not continually called in Scripture "the elect:" yet is there not in the whole language one single term that is so offensive to the world at large, or that is used with more bitter sarcasm than this. Yes; this is regarded precisely as the terms "Christ and Prophet" were by those persecutors of our Lord: and the same idea of presumption and hypocrisy is now attached to those who claim the

^c Isai. l. 6. See also our Lord's own prophecy, Luke xviii. 32.

^d Beza justly translates *ἐρράπισαν bacillis ceciderunt*. And this marks the accomplishment of Micah's prophecy.

former title, as was annexed to the pretensions of our blessed Lord to the office and character of the Messiah. But as then the contempt poured on Jesus confirmed that very truth which it was designed to invalidate, so the reproach cast on God's elect at this day, is an evidence in their favour: our Lord himself declared, that "it should turn unto us for a testimony^e." Let us not then think it strange if we are called to endure fiery trials; but let us expect to be conformed to our blessed Saviour as well in sufferings as in glory.]

3. How we are to conduct ourselves under such treatment—

[We should "arm ourselves with the same mind" that was in Christ Jesus. We should "possess our souls in patience," and "let patience have its perfect work." "Being reviled, we should bless; being defamed, we should entreat; being persecuted, we should suffer it." We should not either in word or deed avenge ourselves, but "give our cheek to the smiters" like him^f, and commit ourselves to him who judgeth righteously; who will in due time "recompense tribulation to them who trouble us, and to us who are troubled, rest."]

^e Luke xxi. 12, 13.

^f Lam. iii. 30.

MCCCCVI.

IMPENITENCE.

Matt. xxvii. 3—5. *Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the Chief Priests and Elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? See thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.*

AS Jesus was by his own death to take away the sins of others, it was necessary, not only that he should have no sin himself^a, but that his innocence should be made to appear by every species of evidence that could be adduced to confirm it. Accordingly, it pleased God so to overrule events, that the witnesses brought against him should not agree in their testimony; that the very judge who was to condemn him should repeatedly pronounce him guiltless; and that

^a John iii. 5.

even the wretch who betrayed him should, with very peculiar solemnity, attest his innocence.

We might from this circumstance proceed to prove the Messiahship of Jesus, and the consequent truth of the religion which he has established. But it is our intention to enter more deeply into the passage before us; and to consider, not merely the general result of Judas' confession, but the various characters delineated in the words before us.

And here we have a very striking picture of,

I. The thoughtless sinner—

[Judas, it should seem, never thought that his Master would suffer himself to be apprehended and put to death. He had often seen Jesus escaping in a miraculous manner out of the hands of his enemies^b, and confounding the people who came to apprehend him, so that they could not prosecute their purpose^c: and therefore he expected that he would act in a somewhat similar manner on this occasion. It was in the hope of this that he was prevailed upon to sell and betray his Lord. Had he foreseen all the consequences that followed, it is probable he would not, at least for so small a sum, have subjected his Master to such miseries, and himself to such infamy and ruin.

And is it not thus with sinners in general? Do they not all proceed to gratify their own inclinations under the idea that no great evil shall arise from it, either to themselves or others? Had David the remotest thought that his numbering of the people would issue in the destruction of seventy thousand of his subjects? Or did he, when sending for Bathsheba, foresee the murder of Uriah, together with about forty others; or the hardening of so many thousands, in that and every age, against the ways of God?

Let us come still nearer home: does the seducer consider what he is likely to bring upon the person whom he tempts from the path of virtue? Does he contemplate her shame and sorrow, or the inconsolable anguish of her parents; or the temporal and eternal ruin which she herself will bring on others? Does he contemplate her infamous life, her loathsome death, her endless misery? Ah! were he to have one glimpse of all the consequences of his conduct, we can scarcely conceive any man so abandoned as to purchase a momentary gratification at so high a price. Does he also consider the consequences as they respect himself? Alas! he thinks of nothing but the indulgence of his lusts: he considers the bait, without adverting

^b Luke iv. 30. John viii. 59.

^c John vii. 45, 46.

to the hook: he promises himself that nothing very calamitous shall result from his conduct: he trusts that through the mercy of God it shall pass unnoticed; or that he shall, by repentance, make compensation for it; or that he shall, by some other means, enjoy the pleasures of sin, without experiencing its bitter consequences. With these vain hopes he goes forward, till he finds, too late, that the evils which he would not anticipate, he is not able to control.]

II. The awakened sinner—

[Thoughtless as is the career of the wicked, they cannot always ward off conviction. Even Judas at last “repented himself.” What a different aspect had sin when his eyes were opened, from what it had when he was blinded by his covetousness! The wages of iniquity, which at first promised him so much happiness, were now a burthen to him, inasmuch that he tendered them to the chief priests again, and, when they refused his offer, cast them down in the temple with indignation and abhorrence. He proceeded further: he confessed and aggravated his sin; and strove to undo the evil he had committed; yea, and indirectly testified against the wickedness of the priests, who had conspired to shed, and tempted him to betray, the innocent blood of Jesus.

All this indeed proceeded only from a selfish terror, and from a vain hope of pacifying his conscience by these means. In the midst of all, there was no real contrition, any more than in Saul^d or Pharaoh^e: there was no prayer to God; no faith in Christ. Though, therefore, he was awakened and terrified, he was far from being truly converted to God.

In him we may see the picture of thousands, both in ancient and modern times. Many will make restitution of their ill-gotten gain: many under a sense of guilt will confess some heinous crime; especially when the consequences of it far exceed their expectations. We do not wish indeed to depreciate the value of such changes: but it is incumbent on us to declare that they are far from constituting true repentance. They argue an awakened, but not a converted mind. There must be, in addition to all this, a deep humiliation, a lively faith, and an earnest crying unto God for mercy. And if, like Judas, we do not hate sin, but only its consequences; if we confess to man only, and not to God; if we labour to expiate our guilt by restitution or reformation, instead of fleeing for refuge to the blood of atonement; we shall, like him, have no solid benefit from our repentance: our very sorrows will be only an earnest of hell itself.]

III. The hardened sinner—

^d 1 Sam. xxvi. 21.

^e Exod. ix. 27.

[While some are awakened to a sense of their guilt, others proceed in the commission of the most horrible iniquities without remorse or concern. The conduct of Judas in criminating himself before those at whose instigation he had betrayed his Lord, should certainly have operated to suspend their proceedings, and to bring them to repentance. But they were bent on the accomplishment of their blood-thirsty purposes, and were alike deaf to the confessions of their agent and to the voice of their own conscience.

But shall we say that this was a singular case? Would to God that similar instances did not perpetually occur! Return to the case of the seducer. See him, when the unhappy victim of his wiles comes to him under the most insupportable agonies of mind, and calls on him for comfort and support: what answer so common as that given in the text? The obdurate wretch, forgetful of all the obligations of honour and conscience, replies in answer to all her complaints, "What is that to me? look thou to that." Thus it is also with those who tempt the inconsiderate youth to extravagance; and, having caught him in their net, demand their debts with unfeeling menaces and inexorable rigour. Perhaps in none is such conduct more manifest than in the gamester, who, having gained the property of his companion, discards all thought of his personal and domestic troubles, and, rejoicing over the spoils which he has gotten, says in his heart, "What is that to me? see thou to that."

Numberless other instances might be adduced to shew, how sin hardens the heart against the *temporal* distresses of those whom we ourselves have beguiled. And how are we affected by their *spiritual* trouble? Here, for the most part, our indifference rises to contempt: and, instead of being led by the penitence of our companions to follow their good example, we load them with opprobrious names, alike regardless of their sorrows and of our own safety.]

IV. The despairing sinner—

[There is a "repentance unto salvation;" but there is also a repentance which leaves room for everlasting penitence, "a repentance to be repented of." Such was the remorse which Judas felt on this occasion. It carried him far, (would to God that all were even as much affected with their sins as he!) but still he stopped short of true repentance. Having no faith in Jesus^f, he abandoned himself to despair; and, to terminate the present agonies of his mind, he put a period to his existence.

Such despair is not uncommon: nor is it uncommon to

^f John vi. 64, 70, 71.

behold it issuing in suicide. Indeed, it is a very principal device of Satan to urge men to this fatal act, because it most effectually secures his object, the destruction of their souls. He first hides from them the consequences of transgression; then represents to them their guilt as unpardonable; and then suggests, that death will put a period to their sorrows. This temptation is most strongly felt by those who have sinned against light and knowledge. "Putting away a good conscience, they are left to make shipwreck of their faith." And it seems a just and righteous retribution, that they who so ungratefully reject the counsel of God, should ultimately "perish in their own corruptions."]

ADDRESS—

1. Let us not condemn religion for the faults of those who profess it—

[How absurd would it be to bring the treachery of Judas as an argument against the truth of Christianity! Does Christianity encourage treason? Did even the traitor himself approve of his own conduct? If all the twelve Disciples had been traitors, it would not have altered the nature of true religion: *that* is unalterably pure and holy: and where its operation is effectual, it transforms men into the image of their God.]

2. Let us guard against the love of the world—

[This was the root of Judas' apostasy. He loved money, and "was a thief from the beginning:" and at last, from indulging in petty thefts, he was prevailed upon for gain to betray his Lord. Thousands of others also are, from the very same principle, yet daily erring from the faith, and piercing themselves through with many sorrows^g. Let us then beware, lest this "root of bitterness springing up, trouble, and defile, and destroy our souls." We shall find at last, that to gain the whole world, and lose our own souls, is an unprofitable bargain.]

3. Let us carefully improve the means of grace—

[The traitor enjoyed every privilege which man could possess: he had even been warned by Jesus respecting the very crime he was going to commit. Happy had it been for him if he had improved the warning! He would then have shunned the fatal act which precipitated him "to his own place." Happy also would it be for us, if we made a suitable improvement of the warnings and instructions given to us! We should then avoid every species of iniquity, and our feet would be guided into the way of peace.]

^g 1 Tim. vi. 10.

MCCCCVII.

THE DISPOSAL OF THE MONEY PAID TO THE TRAITOR
JUDAS.

Matt. xxvii. 9, 10. *Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.*

THE more we consider the number and minuteness of the prophecies, the more we must be convinced that Jesus was the person whom God had fore-ordained to be the Saviour of the world. One can scarcely imagine it possible, that an uninspired person should venture to predict such remarkable circumstances, as the precise sum that should be paid for the Saviour's blood, and the ultimate disposal of that money in the purchase of a potter's field; or that such predictions should be fulfilled by chance. St. Matthew was more careful than any of the other Evangelists in adducing these proofs of Christ's Messiahship. But the passage cited by him as from Jeremiah, is to be found only in the prophecies of Zechariah. To account for this, many ingenious conjectures have been offered by learned men: but the most probable of them seems to be, either that the name, being abbreviated, was mistaken by some early transcriber, and from thence copied by others^a; or that, no name being mentioned by the Evangelist, an early transcriber inserted erroneously the name of Jeremiah in the margin, from whence it was afterwards incorporated with the text^b. Whatever way we take of solving the difficulty, the fact remains the same, that the peculiar circumstances in the text were foretold many hundred years before their accomplishment.

The words of the prophet, according to their literal import, record a transaction that took place between

^a This might easily be, as the mistake would be only of one letter, *Ιουον* for *Ζουον*. In some copies the name is so abbreviated.

^b Some Versions insert no name at all, but read the passage thus; "Spoken by the Prophet."

the prophet and the Jews. The prophet, as God's agent and representative among them, demanded, What value they set upon his labours? They despising both him and the Deity from whom he had received his commission, weighed for his price thirty pieces of silver: upon which, God, indignant at such an insult, ordered him to cast them away to a poor potter, who was at that time working in the temple^c. Under this figure God intended to foreshew how the Jews would undervalue the great Prophet whom he should send among them; and how the thirty pieces of silver, which they would pay as "the price of his blood," should be disposed of.

That we may give a practical turn to our subject, we shall deduce from the different parts of it some important OBSERVATIONS:

1. For how small a price do men sacrifice their interest in the Saviour!

[God himself exclaims with astonishment, "A goodly price that I was prized at of them^d!" Thirty pieces of silver was the price of a slave^e: and yet that was (in the estimation of the Jews) the value of Jehovah's mercies, and (in the eyes of Judas and the Jewish rulers) of the Redeemer's blood. But *we*, it may be said, know how to form a different estimate of these things. Would to God we did! But there is no gain so small, no pleasure so transient, but we choose it in preference to Christ, and are willing to part with Christ rather than forego the gratification we desire. Let sinners of every description attest (for indeed, however reluctantly, they must attest) this melancholy truth — — —]

2. How worthless will those things, for which we sold the Saviour, appear to us, as soon as conscience begins to perform its office!

[Judas had pleased himself with the thought of enjoying his ill-gotten wealth: but scarcely had he obtained it, before he was far more ready to part with it than ever he had been to procure it. Sin of every kind appears very different after we have committed it, from what it did under the immediate influence of temptation. While solicited by our own corrupt affections, we imagine that the particular object of our desire (whatever it may be) will conduce greatly to our happiness:

^c See Zech. xi. 12, 13. ^d Zech. xi. 13. ^e Exod. xxi. 32.

but when we have swallowed the bait, then we begin to feel the hook; and oftentimes would gladly restore, if it were possible, all the pleasure we have felt, provided we could at the same time get rid of the sting that it has left behind. And what will be our views of sin, when once we come into the eternal world? How gladly would we then restore the thirty pieces of silver for which we have sold the Lord! Or, if through penitence and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ we have obtained mercy, with what indignation should we receive a proposal to forego an interest in the Saviour for some momentary pleasure, or some trifling gain!———Ten thousand worlds would then appear to us as of no value in comparison of that inestimable pearl.]

3. Of how little avail will it be at the last day, to have rendered unto God a partial and hypocritical obedience!

[We blame not the priests for refusing to put into the treasury the money which Judas cast down in the temple: for if the price of a dog, or the hire of a harlot, were not to be presented to God, much less ought money that had been the reward of treachery, and “the price of blood.” But we marvel at their hypocrisy, in that they could suborn false witnesses, and persecute unto death an innocent man, and yet profess the smallest reverence for God. Truly, while “they strained out a gnat, they swallowed a camel.” They hoped perhaps to compensate for their oppression of Jesus by their gratuitous kindness to strangers^f. Yet, if we know ourselves, we shall not greatly wonder: for we may find a transcript of this very thing in our own hearts. How many are there eminent for truth and honesty, who are yet habitually regardless of all the sublimer exercises of religion! With respect to the second table of the law, they are exemplary; but in their duties to God, they are altogether remiss. In the same manner, there are some who profess a great regard for the Gospel, who yet are defective in their adherence even to truth and honesty. Indeed there are very few, who do not notoriously fail in some one particular: so “deceitful, and desperately wicked, is the heart of man.” But it is certain that an observance of some duties will never procure us an exemption from others: “if we keep the whole law, and yet offend knowingly and habitually in any one point, we are guilty of all,” and shall be dealt with as contemners of the Lawgiver himself.

^f The field having been exhausted by the pottery, and rendered unfit for cultivation or pasture, was probably worth no more than what they gave for it, and applicable to no better purpose than that to which they destined it.

And as the name, "Aceldama," perpetuated the memory of the atrocious wickedness committed by the priests^g, so shall the very endeavours we use to conceal our impieties stamp them at last with indelible and eternal infamy.]

4. How certainly shall every jot and tittle of God's word be accomplished!

[Little did the chief priests think of fulfilling the Scriptures: and little do the contemners of God and his Christ reflect, that they will one day be exhibited as proofs of God's veracity. But, as all the most contingent actions of men were infallibly foreseen, and not one single prediction, however improbable, ever failed of its accomplishment; so every promise and every threatening shall be fulfilled in its season, and the lot of men be fixed according to their true character. *In this world*, we see enough to assure us that God is true; but *in the world to come*, there shall be in all an irresistible demonstration of it: and every man, whether in heaven or in hell, shall be a living witness of his truth: the blessed shall inherit his promised mercies; the damned shall feel his threatened judgments. Let us consider then, that either our salvation or "damnation lingereth not;" and that "the things spoken concerning us have an end."]

^g ver. 6—8. with Acts i. 18, 19.

MCCCCVIII.

PILATE'S PROTEST.

Matt. xxvii. 24, 25. *When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children.*

IT was appointed under the law, that the beasts offered in sacrifice should be without blemish: and, for ascertaining their fitness to be offered, the strictest scrutiny was made. In the various examinations which our blessed Lord underwent, there was an exact accomplishment of this type: and the testimonies given by all who were concerned in his death, seem to have been providentially appointed for the manifesting of his fitness for the great work he had undertaken, even

the work of saving a ruined world by the sacrifice of himself. His hour was now come that he should be delivered up to death: and Pilate, who had investigated every charge that was brought against him, and had already a great many times attested his innocence, now in the most solemn manner entered his protest against the procedure of his blood-thirsty enemies, and declared, that in putting him to death they would murder a just and inoffensive man; of which atrocious act they, and they only, should bear the guilt. In reply to this, they said, that if he would only leave them to execute their purpose, they were willing to take all responsibility from him, and all consequences on themselves; "His blood be on us, and on our children." Thus, even they, at the very time that they demanded his death, unwittingly acknowledged the truth of Pilate's assertions, and set their seal to this blessed truth, that Jesus was "cut off, not for his own sins," but for the sins of those whom he came to save.

Let us however take a nearer view of this subject; and distinctly consider,

I. Pilate's vain protest—

In some respects Pilate may be considered as having acted a bold and honest part; for

This protest of his was very solemn—

[It should seem that the washing of the hands in token of innocence, was a custom not unknown to the Romans: and, among the Jews, it was prescribed by God himself; when murder had been committed by some unknown person, and those who, from their proximity to the spot, might be supposed to have had some knowledge of the transaction, were called to clear themselves^a. By this significant action did Pilate proclaim his determination not to embroil his hands in innocent blood; accompanying it with a solemn testimony in favour of the person accused, and an admonition to his enemies that they, and they only, must be answerable for his death.

Thus far we approve, and applaud his protest.]

But it was vain—

[In some cases, such a protest would have really acquitted him in the sight both of God and man—

^a Deut. xxi. 6, 7.

If the matter had been to be determined by a majority of voices, his conscience would have been clear. This was the case when Joseph, one of the Jewish council, was out-voted in the Sanhedrim; and God himself acquits him of any participation in their guilt^b.

If the act had not been in itself sinful; and circumstances had occurred that rendered that necessary, which, under other circumstances, would have been inexpedient and improper; *then* his protest would have cleared him, even though he had done the act against which he protested: for this was the case of Paul, when he was compelled by the intrigues of false teachers to confirm his apostolic authority by an appeal to visions, of which it would otherwise have been inexpedient for him to boast^c.

But Pilate was a governor and a judge, whose duty it was, no less to protect the innocent, than to punish the guilty. He had no right to sacrifice the life of an innocent person to the clamours of a mob. He should have told them plainly, that he would rather sacrifice his situation, and even life itself, than be guilty of such horrible injustice. And, however menacing the rising tumult might appear, he should have adhered to the path of duty, and risked all consequences. In not doing this, he neglected his office; and, by consenting to their wickedness, made himself a partaker of it. It was to no purpose to enter a protest against the act, and then join in the commission of it. His saying, "I am innocent," did not make him innocent: on the contrary, we are assured, on infallible authority, that in the sight of God he is considered as a confederate with the very people whom he thus professed to condemn^d.]

Nor less vain are many similar protests that are made amongst ourselves—

[What is more common than to reply, in justification of ourselves, 'I *must* do so?' One says, 'I *must* be guilty of such and such frauds: it is not my fault, but the fault of the trade: one cannot carry on trade without it.' Another, whilst he conforms to the sinful customs of the world, urges a similar excuse; 'I *must* do so, else I shall incur the odium of singularity, and endanger both my reputation and interest. I acknowledge that the things are wrong; but I *must* do them.' Know then, that, if you *must* do them, you *must* also answer for them at the tribunal of God: and that, in that day, "not he who acquitteth himself shall be approved, but he whom the Lord acquitteth^e."]]

^b Luke xxiii. 51.

^d Acts. iv. 27.

^c 2 Cor. xii. 1, 11.

^e 2 Cor. x. 18.

Let us now turn our attention to,

II. The people's rash engagement—

The guilt and punishment of murder were, among the Jews, expressed by “the blood of the murdered person being upon them^f.” By this imprecation, therefore, the people meant to relieve Pilate's conscience, and to pacify his fears; engaging, that the crucifixion of Christ should never be considered as *his* act, but *theirs*; and that the consequences of it, if any, should come, not on *him*, but on *them* and *their children*. But,

What a rash engagement was this!

[What answer would it be to Cæsar, if, being summoned to give an account of the injustice committed, and the dishonour brought thereby upon the whole Roman empire, Pilate should say, ‘The people forced me to it?’ Were not the people his subjects? and had he not the Roman soldiers at his command, to keep them in awe? To what purpose was he entrusted with this power, if he did not exercise it? Would this promise, of taking the responsibility on themselves, remove it from him? Assuredly not: on *him*, and not on *them*, would Cæsar's displeasure fall.

But, supposing they could protect him from Cæsar's anger, could they heal the wound which this act would inflict upon his conscience? Would this stern monitor be silent at their bidding? No: its remonstrances would be heard in spite of them; and to his dying hour would the voice of innocent blood cry out against him.

Thus, as it respected *him*, their engagement was vain and nugatory; but not so as it respected *themselves*: God held them to it: and made them feel the fearful responsibility attaching to it. But a few days elapsed, before they expressed their fears lest their imprecations should be answered^g: and before that generation passed away, the Divine judgments came upon them to the uttermost; insomuch that the Jewish historian, who was himself a spectator of the fact, declares, that such multitudes of the captive Jews were crucified during the siege of Jerusalem, that ‘there wanted room for the crosses to stand upon, and wood to make them of.’ *Then* was their request fulfilled: *then* was “the blood of Christ on them indeed, and on their children;” and, from that hour to the present moment, have they been “made an astonishment, and an hissing, and perpetual desolations^h.”]

^f Matt. xxiii. 35.

^g Acts v. 28.

^h Jer. xxv. 9.

And how much better are the engagements which many amongst us are ready to take upon themselves?

[When we endeavour to prevail on persons to act against the convictions of their conscience, we are ready to laugh at their scruples, and to ridicule their fears; and with great confidence to pledge our words, that their compliance with our advice will be attended with no bad consequence whatever. But, when we have prevailed over their credulity, can we fulfil our word? Can we in many cases avert even the temporal consequences of their conduct? How much less can we silence the clamours of their guilty consciences! — — — And least of all can we stand between God and their souls in the day of judgment — — —]

But though we cannot fulfil our engagements to *them*, we must, together with them, answer for our conduct to God; and perish under the accumulated guilt of ruining their souls. "Their blood will be required at our hands" — — —]

Let us LEARN then from hence,

1. To discard the fear of man—

[You see how true is that declaration, that "the fear of man bringeth a snareⁱ." Had Pilate in the first instance withstood, as he ought, the clamours of the people, he had never embroiled his hands in the Saviour's blood. He might have fallen a sacrifice to their rage, it is true; but he would have had reason to all eternity to rejoice that he had died in such a cause. And we would ask of you, What are your feelings *now* in reference to any sinful compliances you may have been drawn into, or any injuries you may have suffered in consequence of your non-compliance? Do you not even *now* see that it is better to regard God than man^k? Then "fear not man, who can only kill the body; but God, who can destroy both body and soul in hell: yea, I say unto you, fear Him^l" — — — Let the conduct of Levi be our pattern^m— and the command of Jesus our ruleⁿ—.]

2. To maintain always a good conscience—

[God has given us a conscience, to be his vicegerent in the soul. It may be said, that Paul sinned in following his conscience^o. We answer, that he sinned, not in following his conscience, but in having such a misguided conscience. We should by a constant study of the Scriptures, and by fervent prayer for the teachings of God's Spirit, get our conscience enlightened and rectified. If we neglect to do this, we are

ⁱ Prov. xxix. 25.

^k Acts iv. 19.

^l Luke xii. 4, 5.

^m Deut. xxxiii. 9.

ⁿ Luke xiv. 26, 27.

^o Acts xxvi. 9.

answerable before God for all the errors we run into. But still we must follow the light we have. We must listen to the dictates of conscience at all times, and follow them without reserve. Every thing that it enjoins we must do^p, and nothing that it forbids^q. If it even suggest a doubt, we must not proceed till that doubt be removed^r. Nothing is more terrible than an accusing conscience^s; nothing more delightful than testimonies of its approbation^t. Labour therefore with all your might to acquire a good conscience, and “exercise yourselves night and day to maintain it^u.”]

^p Jam. iv. 17.

^q Rom. xiv. 22.

^r Rom. xiv. 23.

^s Matt. xxvii. 3, 4.

^t 2 Cor. i. 12.

^u Acts xxiv. 16.

MCCCCIX.

THE INDIGNITIES OFFERED TO OUR LORD.

Matt. xxvii. 26—31. *Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified. Then the soldiers of the Governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, king of the Jews! And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head. And after they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him.*

AT this season^a we are naturally led to contemplate the sufferings of our blessed Lord. In general, we think it desirable to fix your minds on some one point; because that, if duly opened, will afford ample matter for one discourse: but now we will rather call your attention to this assemblage of facts; not so much for the purpose of elucidating each particular indignity that was offered him, as, from a collective view of them, to shew you the Lord Jesus Christ,

I. As the predicted Messiah—

There was scarcely an incident relating to his death which was not the subject of a distinct prophecy—

[It was foretold that he should be scourged. The Prophet Isaiah says, that “the chastisement of our peace was

^a The *Passion Week*.

upon him, and by his stripes we are healed^b." And though the Psalmist appears to speak of Israel at large, yet I think he has also an eye to God's servant Israel, the Messiah, in particular, when he says, "The plowers plowed upon my back; they made long their furrows^c. The various indignities of mocking and reproaching, and the spitting in his face, were also specifically mentioned: "I gave my back to the smiters, (where the scourging is again referred to,) and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting^d." And the Prophet Micah says, "They shall smite the Judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek^e." And, in reference to these things, the Psalmist says, "Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none: and for comforters, but I found none^f. His crucifixion was plainly declared in the erection of the brazen serpent in the wilderness^g; as was also the place where it should be carried into effect, by the burning of the sacrifices without the camp^h. These things were also distinctly foreseen, and plainly predicted, by our blessed Lord; predicted, too, as subjects of prophecy, which were assuredly to be fulfilled: "He took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go to Jerusalem; and *all things that are written by the prophets* concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on, and they shall scourge him, and put him to deathⁱ."]

And these things were all literally fulfilled in him—

[His scourging is first mentioned in my text. But this was inflicted *to prevent his crucifixion*. Pilate hoped, by scourging Jesus, to pacify the anger of the Jews against him, and to move them to compassion towards him^k: so that the very mercy of his judge, no less than the fury of his persecutors, contributed to fill up the destined measure of his sufferings.

The various insults and indignities that were offered him are next mentioned. And *where* were they inflicted? In the very hall of Pilate himself, and by the very soldiers who were under his command! The discipline maintained amongst the Roman soldiers was exceeding strict: yet did they, under the very eye of the Governor, not execute his wishes, but go in direct opposition to them, to please and gratify the Jews: and thus they, *voluntarily*, and *of their own mind*, and *in direct violation of their military duty*, at the risk of being called to a

^b Isai. liii. 5.

^c Ps. cxxix. 3. with Isai. xlix. 3.

^d Isai. l. 6.

^e Mic. v. 1.

^f Ps. lxix. 20.

^g John iii. 14, 15.

^h Lev. iv. 12.

ⁱ Luke xviii. 31—33.

^k Luke xxiii. 16, 22. with John xix. 1, 4, 6.

severe account for it, go beyond the laws, and add punishments which the law did not prescribe, that so the Scriptures of the prophets might, unwittingly indeed on their part, be in every thing fulfilled.

His crucifixion closes the scene. But *that* was not a Jewish punishment: it was a penalty inflicted only by the Roman law: yet, though the law by which he was judged was Jewish, the punishment inflicted on him was Roman. But so the prophecies had foretold: and it was not possible that one word of them should fail of its accomplishment. The Roman Governor, without whose authority it could not be executed, did all in his power to prevent it; but could not prevail. He would gladly have embraced the opportunity, which custom had sanctioned, of pardoning one of the prisoners: but the Jews chose rather to have a murderer spared, than Him; a murderer, whose guilt was fully proved, rather than Jesus, whom the judge himself, after the fullest investigation, affirmed to be innocent. But so God had ordained; and so it came to pass.

Behold, then, how clear and indisputable is his Messiahship! Things were foretold which had no relation to each other, and which, in the common course of events, were inconsistent with each other. But in him they all combined; and they came to pass, not through the well-adjusted efforts of friends to fulfil them, but through the unwitting agency of enemies, and through the very efforts which were made to prevent the accomplishment of them. I ask, then, with confidence, "Is not He the Christ?"

Let us now view him in another light; namely,

II. As our surety and substitute—

Having undertaken for us, he must bear all that our sins had merited—

[Shame, and misery, and death, were our proper and deserved portion. Even in this world "the way of transgressors is hard," and "there is no peace to the wicked;" and the sentence of death hangeth over us: and, in the eternal world, the wicked will "awake to shame and everlasting contempt^m." (Who can conceive the contempt and indignation that will then be felt against them by God himself, and by the saints who will sit with him as his assessors in judgment? The sentence that will be denounced against them in that day amply declares that point: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.") As for the misery that awaits us, no finite imagination can conceive it, when we shall lie down "in the lake of fire and brimstone, and spend a

¹ John iv. 29.

^m Dan. xii. 2.

never-ending eternity in “weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.” In a word, the curse of the lawⁿ, “the wrath of God,” and “the damnation of hell,” which are the bitter ingredients of “the second death,” are the sinner’s doom.]

Now these, as far as was necessary for our redemption, he bore for us—

[As for the idea of every individual part of his sufferings making an atonement for every corresponding circumstance in our sins, I look upon it as altogether fanciful and absurd. But the great leading points of his sufferings and of our deserts do fully correspond with each other. Every mark of ignominy was shewn him, both in these his preparatory sufferings, and in his death itself, which was inflicted only on slaves, and which was declared by the Jewish law accursed. And “who ever beheld sorrow like unto his sorrow^o?” Truly beyond any other person that ever existed upon earth was he despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief^p:” “the whole nation despised and abhorred him^q,” and “his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men^r.” Finally, in his death, “he became a curse for us, that he might deliver us from the curse” to which we were doomed^s.” Thus did he not merely die in our stead, “the just for the unjust^t,” as a common victim in the place of the offender, but he fully discharged our debt in every particular; so that neither law nor justice can demand any thing further at our hands. Methinks we were lying, like Isaac, bound upon the altar, the knife being lifted up to inflict the deadly stroke, and the wood and fire prepared ready to consume us; but Jesus, as the ram caught in the thicket, undergoes the whole for us, and restores us to the bosom of our Father and our God. “By his stripes we are healed^u,” and by his death we live for ever^x.]

Once more we may, in the midst of these sufferings, contemplate him,

III. As our great example—

What he endured shews us what we also shall have to bear—

[“God has predestinated us to be conformed to the image of his Son^y:” and our blessed Lord has told us, that, as men hated and “persecuted him, so they will hate and

ⁿ Deut. xxi. 23.

^q Isai. xlix. 7.

^t 1 Pet. iii. 18.

^y Rom. viii. 29.

^o Lam. i. 12.

^r Isai. lii. 14.

^u 1 Pet. ii. 24.

^p Isai. liii. 3.

^s Gal. iii. 13.

^x 1 Thess. v. 10.

persecute us^z.” “The servant cannot expect to be above his master: it is sufficient for him, if he be as his lord. If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household^a.” We may see therefore, in the universality, contemptuousness, and acrimony of his persecutors, what his followers must expect, even unto death. We are expressly told, that “we are called to the same, because Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps^b”: and, seeing that he has suffered for us without the gates of Jerusalem, we must go forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach^c.”]

It shews us, too, in what way we must bear it—

[In the whole of these sufferings, we hear not one word of complaint. No, verily: though “he was so oppressed and afflicted, yet opened he not his mouth. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so opened he not his mouth^d.” This especially is marked out for our imitation by St. Peter. “Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not, but committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously^e.” To this effect we are instructed by our Lord, and all his holy Apostles: instead of “rendering evil for evil unto any man,” we must “love our enemies, bless them that curse us, do good to them that hate us, and pray for them that despitefully use us and persecute us^f.” Nor let this be thought impossible. It was done by Stephen, in the very hour of martyrdom^g: and it was nobly carried into effect by St. Paul, throughout the whole of his ministrations: “We are made a spectacle,” says he, “unto the world, and to angels, and to men. Even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place; and labour, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat. We are made as the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all things, unto this day^h.” Here you see practical Christianity: and, if you come from the hall where Jesus so meekly bare all his ignominious treatment, and learn “so to walk as he walked,” you will not have beheld this sight in vain. “Consider then, I pray you, brethren, Him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself;” that you, under similar treatment, may never be weary nor faint in your mindsⁱ.”]

^z John xv. 20.

^a Matt. x. 24, 25.

^b 1 Pet. ii. 21.

^c Heb. xiii. 12, 13.

^d Isai. liii. 7.

^e 1 Pet. ii. 21—23.

^f Matt. v. 44.

^g Acts. vii. 60.

^h 1 Cor. iv. 9—13.

ⁱ Heb. xii. 3.

Let me not conclude without further REMARKING on this subject,

1. How astonishing is the love of Christ to sinful man!

[Our blessed Lord, as I have shewn, foresaw from the beginning all that should come upon him: yet, instead of drawing back, he longed for the period even to be baptized with this bloody baptism, and was quite "straitened till it should be accomplished"^k. What manner of love was this! When shall we learn to estimate it aright? O, brethren, seek to "comprehend its breadth and length, and depth and height!" for it is by that, and by that only, that you can be "filled with all the fulness of God"^l — — —]

2. How infatuated must they be who do not seek those blessings, for the obtaining of which all these things were endured!

[Who would believe that men professing to receive this record as true, and to hope for mercy through these very sufferings, should yet be as careless about their souls, as if they were of no value; and as indifferent about eternity, as if there were no future state of existence? Look at the Saviour, brethren, and reflect, Who he is; and what he has done; and what he has suffered; and *for what end* all these things have been effected! Had your souls been of little value, would all these things have come to pass? Had the future state of existence been a matter of such indifference, would the Son of the Living God have suffered all this for you? Go to the garden of Gethsemane; go to the hall of judgment; go to Mount Calvary; and learn the value of immortal souls: go, I say, and learn the folly and madness of neglecting this Saviour, through whom alone any soul of man can be saved. I pray you, beloved, be in earnest, whilst yet the sufferings of God's dear Son may avail for you. But if ye will not seek after him, then think what your portion must be in the eternal world. For, "if these things were done in the green tree, judge ye, what must be done in the dry^m?"]

^k Luke xii. 50.

^l Eph. iii. 18, 19.

^m Luke xxiii. 31.

MCCCCX.

THE MOCKING OF CHRIST UPON THE CROSS.

Matt. xxvii. 38—44. *Then were there two thieves crucified with him; one on the right hand, and another on the left. And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and*

saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the Scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.

SOME, from idle curiosity, are fond of attending upon public executions; whilst others, from a commendable sensibility, could not prevail upon themselves to be present at such a scene. But there is no room for the one or other of these feelings, in the scene now presented to our view. Our corporeal senses can neither be gratified nor shocked: it is by faith only that we can realize the transactions of this day: but if we have faith, we shall “look on Him whom we have pierced, and mourn, and be in bitterness, as for a first-born son.” In general, the behaviour of the condemned person is the chief object of contemplation; that of the spectators is never so much as thought of: it is taken for granted, that *that* will be decorous, and suited to the solemn occasion. But, in the present instance, we wish particularly to notice the conduct of those who attended the crucifixion of our Lord: and we shall find that *their treatment of him is replete with instruction* in a variety of views:

I. As an exhibition of man's depravity—

[Much of the wickedness of man appears in the arrest, the prosecution, and the condemnation of our Lord: but in no part of his history do we behold such a mass of impiety as in that before us. For all that preceded his crucifixion, there was a reason: it was deemed necessary for the safety of the state that he should be put to death: and, till they had accomplished that object, we do not wonder at any thing they did to attain it. But, when they had attained it, and there was no further occasion for their hostilities, we are surprised beyond measure that there was no relaxation of their resentment. On all other occasions, the execution of criminals, however deservedly they suffer, calls forth a measure of compassion: but towards him the fury of all ranks of men raged with unabated force; and,

like dogs, they seemed eager to devour the prey which they had already seized.

Had this ferocity been confined to soldiers, we might have supposed that it arose from their education and habits. But "the Chief Priests, with the Scribes and Elders, and even the Rulers," all concurred in devouring the Lamb of God! They altogether forgot the demeanour which befitted their rank and office; yea, they lost sight of all the feelings of humanity; and encouraged by their example those atrocities, which policy, no less than humanity, should have led them to prevent. Even the malefactors caught the infernal flame; and, unmindful of their own agonies, or shame, or approaching dissolution, united in vilifying the Son of God: accounting themselves so much his superiors, that they might justly make him an object of derision and contempt.

Whatever had been a ground of accusation against him, they now made a subject of profane ridicule. Three years before, he had, in reference to his own body, said, "*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again.*" This had been alleged against him, though not substantiated, as an evidence of his hostility to the temple: and now they cast it in his teeth, challenging him, if he were able, to do a much smaller thing, namely, to come down from the cross. His relation to God as his Son, and his power over Israel as their King, he was also called upon to prove, by descending from the cross: and even his affiance in God was deemed so absurd, that God himself was challenged by them to his assistance. All this too was attended with such outward expressions of triumph as corresponded with the malignant feelings of their hearts. But who would have conceived that even his most benevolent miracles should now be made a matter of reproach against him? Yet were even these brought forward, to give the keener edge to their blasphemies: "He saved others; himself he cannot save."

Now view this whole mass of savage cruelty, of base ingratitude, and of horrid impiety; view it as the offspring, not of one superlatively wicked individual, or of any particular class, but of a whole nation; and then you will be constrained to say, "Lord, what is man? Lord, what is man?"

The conduct of the Jews on this occasion is instructive also,

II. As a trial of Christ's perfection—

[The sacrifices under the law being required to be without spot or blemish, they were examined with the greatest care, that their fitness to be offered might be clearly ascertained. Now as Jesus was to be a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, it pleased God, that, previous to his being offered, he

should undergo the strictest examination. Accordingly the severest scrutiny was instituted, and the result of every fresh examination was a stronger attestation of his innocence. But here we see him put into the hottest furnace, which must infallibly discover the alloy or dross, if any such were found in him. The most eminent of mankind had been subjected to far less trials, and had discovered that they were but men, weak, sinful, and corrupt. Moses had "spoken unadvisedly with his lips;" Job had "cursed the day of his nativity;" and Paul had "reviled the Ruler of God's people." But in Jesus there was not the smallest error or imperfection. Such was his *patience*, that "when he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." He complains indeed by the prophet, "Reproach hath broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness;" yet, as another prophet testifies, "He was altogether like a lamb led to the slaughter, and, like a sheep before her shearers, dumb." Such was his *forbearance* too, that when he might justly have called fire from heaven to consume his enemies, as Elijah did, or caused the earth to open and swallow them up, as it did those who had rebelled against his servant Moses, he would not do it. Nor, on the other hand, would he, as well he might have done, accept their challenge, and prove his almighty power by descending from the cross. He knew that this would not convince them, even if he should do it: he intended also shortly to give them an infinitely stronger evidence of his Messiahship, (even that which he had so often promised them,) by rising from the dead; and he was determined that nothing should divert him from the work which he had undertaken to perform. He might well have said, "Seeing ye put me from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life," I relinquish my work, and leave you to the judgments which you have so richly merited^a. But he would not save himself, because he was bent on saving us; and "for the joy that was set before him," of delivering a ruined world, "he endured the cross, and despised the shame," till he could say, respecting the whole of his work, "It is finished."

Here then we have ample proof of his sinless character, and that he truly was, what it behoved him to be, "a Lamb without blemish and without spot."]

There yet remains one other view in which their treatment of him is instructive; namely,

III. As a proof of his Messiahship—

[The circumstance of his being crucified between two malefactors is declared by the Evangelist to have been an

^a Acts xiii. 46.

accomplishment of that prophecy, "He was numbered with the transgressors." But it was not only in what they *did*, that his enemies fulfilled the Scriptures; they fulfilled them equally in what they *said*; insomuch that, if they had been ever so desirous to conform to the prophetic writings, they could not possibly have fulfilled them more accurately or more minutely. David, personating the Messiah, tells us how his enemies "wagged their heads" at him; and then specified the very words which the chief priests and elders used on this occasion^b. Now, if we consider how exactly this prophecy was fulfilled, and that there were a thousand years between the prophecy and its completion, we shall see that the most casual circumstances of our Lord's humiliation, no less than those which were more plainly determined, attest, beyond a doubt, the truth of his Messiahship.

Let it not be thought, that the notice of these things is a needless repetition. It is by an appeal to prophecy that the Apostles prove the divine mission of their Lord; and therefore, the more fully we mark the accomplishment of Scripture in him, the more abundantly shall we be confirmed in the faith of the Gospel.]

Let us then LEARN from hence,

1. To believe in his name—

[It is not a mere assent to the history of the Gospel that we mean to recommend, but a belief in Jesus as the Saviour of the world. Many consider his death as nothing more than a confirmation of his doctrine; but if he died only to confirm his doctrine, his descent from the cross would have been a stronger confirmation of it than his death. It was as an atoning sacrifice that he died; and therefore his death was indispensable for the completion of his mediatorial work: and it is *in this view* that we call upon you to believe in him. Consider all this contempt and ignominy as endured for you, as "the chastisement of your peace," and as the appointed means of rescuing you from "everlasting shame and contempt"— — —]

2. To follow his steps—

[Our Lord has taught us to expect the same treatment which he himself received. Indeed, it is reasonable to suppose, that "if they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household." How then on such occasions should we behave? We answer, That he has purposely "set us an example, in order that we should follow his steps^c;" and that therefore, whatever we may be called to

^b Ps. xxii. 6—8.

^c 1 Pet. ii. 21—23.

endure, we should “possess our souls in patience^d,” “not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing^e.” This is the express command of our adorable Saviour^f: and the nearer we can resemble him, the more will he be glorified in us. I know that we are apt to plead our weakness and irritability as an excuse for our impatience: but this is no excuse: it only shews how unlike we are to our blessed Lord, and how much we need both his mercy and grace. Paul was a man of like passions with us; and he tells us how he demeaned himself on such occasions; “being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat^g.” Let us remember then, that “the grace of Christ is equally sufficient for us;” that “through his strength we can do all things;” and that the greatest “ornament we can have on earth, is that of a meek and quiet spirit^h.”]

^d Luke xxi. 19. Jam. i. 4.

^e 1 Pet. iii. 9.

^f Matt. v. 44.

^g 1 Cor. iv. 10—13.

^h 1 Pet. iii. 4.

MCCCCXI.

THE SUPERNATURAL DARKNESS.

Matt. xxvii. 45. *Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.*

IT might well be expected that the crucifixion of the Son of God should be accompanied with circumstances of a peculiar nature; sufficient, when properly understood, to remove the offence of his cross, and to distinguish him from all others who should suffer the same kind of death. The whole creation is at God's command, and ready, in any manner that he sees fit, to display his power. The sun in particular has been made his instrument for that end. In the days of Joshua, it suspended its course for the space of a whole day^a. In the days of Hezekiah, it reversed its natural course, and went backwards ten degrees on the sun-dial of Ahaz^b. And now, at the death of Christ, when risen to its meridian height, it veiled its face in darkness^c. How far the darkness extended, whether over the whole earth, as some think, or over the land of Judæa only, as our translators thought,

^a Josh. x. 12, 13.

^b 2 Kings xx. 11.

^c The sixth hour corresponded with our noon.

we do not take upon us to determine; though we incline to the latter: but, whether more or less, it could not proceed from a natural cause. It could not be an eclipse, because the moon at that time was at the full: and even if it had been an eclipse, it could not have been total for more than a quarter of an hour; whereas this continued for the space of three hours. It was manifestly a miraculous darkness, produced by the almighty power of God, and *that* too for ends worthy of a divine interposition. It was,

I. An attestation to our Saviour's character—

[It was ordained of God, that every species of testimony should be given to his Son, in confirmation of his claims as the true Messiah. The particular kinds of testimony were, many hundreds of years before, made the subject of prophecy: and they were almost all of such a nature, as to be independent of his own followers, and consequently incapable of being brought to effect by any concerted plan of theirs. The miracle now exhibited was of that kind: for the whole creation could not have produced such a change in the face of nature: and as it could not be counterfeited, so neither could it be denied: it carried its own evidence along with it.

That this darkness was foretold, we cannot doubt^d. The prophet Joel most indisputably refers to it^e: for an inspired Apostle quotes his very words, and declares, that those words related to events which were to happen at that precise period, *for the express purpose of attesting the Messiahship of Christ*^f.

Behold then a proof which cannot reasonably be doubted. True it is, that the Jewish historian does not record the fact: but we well know how averse he was to mention any thing that tended to the honour of Christianity, and therefore can account easily for his omission of so extraordinary an interposition of the Deity in confirmation of our religion. But the fact itself is undeniable: and if the three days' darkness in Egypt was a convincing testimony from God to the mission of Moses, so was this to the Messiahship of Christ.]

II. An emblem of his sufferings—

["Darkness" is often used in Scripture as a figurative representation of affliction^g — — — But it was peculiarly proper as an emblem on this occasion. Our blessed Lord was under the hidings of his Father's face, and in the depths of dereliction cried, "My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken

^d Amos viii. 9. ^e Joel ii. 30—32. ^f Acts ii. 16, 19—21.

^g Isai. v. 30. and viii. 22. Ezek. xxxii. 7, 8.

me?" His sufferings were such as no finite imagination can conceive. The torments which men inflicted on his body were small, in comparison of those which he now endured in his soul. All the hosts of hell were, as it were, let loose upon him; as He himself says, "This is your hour, and the power of darkness^h." Above all, the wrath of God was now poured out upon him, as the Surety and Substitute of a guilty world; according to that declaration of the prophet, "It pleased the Lord to bruise himⁱ." Under such circumstances, what in the compass of created nature could so fitly represent his sufferings as the event before us^k? Hear the description given of those sufferings by the prophet David^l — — — and no wonder "the sun went down over him, and the day was dark, when he had no answer from his God."]

III. A prognostic of the judgments that should come upon his enemies—

[These were spoken of by Moses and all the prophets; and *that* too under the image which we are considering^m — — — The prophet Amos, in a fore-cited passage, connects the calamities which they should endure with the very event which prefigured themⁿ. Our blessed Lord also foretold them in language not dissimilar^o. And how awfully have these predictions been verified! Surely from the foundation of the world there has never been an instance of any nation suffering such various, accumulated, and continued calamities as they. The darkness of their minds too, no less than the wretchedness of their condition, shews to what an extent the wrath of God is upon them: for a veil is upon their hearts, thicker than even that which obscured the meridian sun. O that at last the veil might be taken away, and that the light of God's countenance might be once more lifted up upon them!]

Though this subject may appear unconnected with practice, it may be justly IMPROVED,

1. For the humbling of the impenitent—

[How awful does the insensibility of man appear, when we see even the material creation more affected, as it were, at the death of Christ, than they! It is a fact, that many who have heard of the death of Christ times without number, and

^h Luke xxii. 53.

ⁱ Isaï. liii. 10.

^k Compare Mic. iii. 6, 7. with Ps. xxii. 1, 2. where the *image* as applied to the false prophets corresponds with the *fact* as exemplified in our Lord.

^l Ps. lxxxviii. 3, 6, 7, 14, 16.

^m Isaï. xliii. 9—11. Jer. xv. 1—3, 9.

ⁿ Amos viii. 9, 10.

^o Mark xliii. 24—26, 30.

who profess to believe that he died for their sins, have yet never once mourned for those sins which nailed him to the accursed tree. Were they to hear of the slightest accident that had befallen their friend or relative, or any trifling loss which they themselves had sustained, they would be affected with it: but the crucifixion of the Lord of Glory is heard of by them without any emotion, even though they themselves were the guilty causes of his death. But let such ungrateful people know, that if ever they be brought to a just sense of their sins, they will “look on Him whom they have pierced, and mourn, and be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born^p.” The Lord hasten this penitential season to every one of us^q! — — —]

2. For the comforting of the afflicted—

[It is not uncommon to find persons deeply distressed on account of the hidings of God’s face. And we acknowledge that they have cause to be distressed; because it is the most afflictive of all events, and because it never takes place but for the correction of some evil in them. Our blessed Lord, though he had no sin of his own, had evil enough upon him, even the sins of the whole world: and Job, though in some sense he was “a perfect man,” had much to learn, and much to attain. Yet let not any one despond, as though the cheerful light of the sun should no more appear: but let those who “walk in darkness and have no light, learn to trust in the Lord, and to stay themselves upon their God^r,” and then “their light shall rise in obscurity, and their darkness be as the noon-day.”]

3. For the encouraging of all—

[Reviving are those words of the Apostle John, “The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth^s.” All that was obscure in the death of Christ is now made plain; and, blessed be God! the whole mystery of Redemption is now exhibited before our eyes. Yes, on us “the Sun of Righteousness has arisen with healing in his wings.” But as we know not how long the light shall continue with us, let us “walk in the light whilst we have it, lest darkness come upon us^t.” If any thing in the dispensations either of providence or of grace be dark to us at the present, let us contentedly say, “What I know not now, I shall know hereafter;” and let us wait in patience for that world, where “our sun shall no more go down, neither shall our moon withdraw itself; but the Lord will be our everlasting light, and the days of our mourning shall be ended^u.”]

^p Zech. xii. 10.

^s 1 John ii. 8.

^q Jer. xiii. 15, 16.

^t John xii. 35.

^r Isai. l. 10.

^u Isai. lx. 20.

MCCCCXII.

SIGNS ATTENDANT ON OUR LORD'S DEATH.

Matt. xxvii. 51. *And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom ; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent.*

THE incarnation and death of God's co-equal, co-eternal Son are facts so incredible, that nothing but a concurrence of the most unquestionable proofs can justify us in believing the Scripture report concerning them. But God has been pleased to give us proofs equal to the occasion. The birth of Christ was attested by a multitude of angels, who were sent from heaven to announce and celebrate the event : and the death of Christ was attested by a variety of signs and wonders, which could not fail to impress all whose minds were open to conviction. The miraculous darkness for the space of three hours at mid-day has been already noticed : and we have now to notice two other phenomena, the earthquake, and the rending of the veil. We may suppose indeed that these two events might happen without any particular interposition of Providence to effect them, or any particular end to be answered by them : but such a construction is altogether precluded, both by the prophetic declarations respecting them, and by the light thrown upon them in the New Testament. It shall be our endeavour at this time,

I. To illustrate these phenomena—

These, like the miraculous darkness, may be considered as testimonies from God to the truth of Christ's Messiahship : but we shall direct our attention to them rather as *signs*, or *emblematic representations*, of mysteries at that time accomplished. In this view let us notice,

1. The earthquake—

[This had been predicted by the Prophet Haggai^a : and though we might have justly regarded the expressions used by

^a Hagg. ii. 6, 7, 21.

him as designating only some great political convulsion, yet we have reason to think that they had a literal accomplishment in the event before us. It must be remembered, that, at the giving of the Law, "the whole of Mount Sinai quaked greatly"^b. Thus at the termination of that, and the introduction of the Christian, dispensation, a similar miracle was wrought; "the earth quaked to its very centre; and the rocks were rent asunder:" and we are warranted by an inspired Apostle to declare, that that phenomenon shadowed forth the abolition of the whole Jewish economy, and the establishment of Christianity in its place^c. It is observable, too, that the Apostle lays all the stress on one particular word of the prophet; (a word which superficial readers would have overlooked;) and shews, that it was intended by God himself to *foretell*, and to *explain*, the earthquake which we are now speaking of. The tabernacle and all the things belonging to it were "*made*" by the hands of men, and therefore were not intended to continue beyond a certain period: but, under the Christian dispensation, every thing is spiritual and of Divine origin, and consequently is destined to endure for ever: the removal of the former, therefore, and the establishment of the latter, being fixed in the Divine counsels, they were predicted by the prophet, and expressly marked in that one word which the Apostle so correctly notices; "This word, *Yet once more*, signifieth *the removing* of those *things that are shaken*, as of things that are made, that those *things which cannot be shaken*, may remain."

What obligations do we owe to God for the light which the New Testament reflects on the Jewish writings, and for the confirmation which it receives from them! No uninspired author could ever have discovered such mysteries in so obscure a passage; nor can any one who beholds this inspired exposition of it, withhold his admiration of the unfathomable depths of God's wisdom and knowledge.]

2. The rending of the veil—

[This was not a mere accident arising from the earthquake, but an appointment of God for the fuller manifestation of his own purpose and grace.

There were two veils in the temple; the one separating the holy place from the outer court, and the other separating the holy place from the holy of holies. This latter veil was for the purpose of screening from the view of men the ark and the shechinah, that bright symbol of the Deity. This was the veil that was "rent in twain from the top to the bottom:" and the rending of it denoted three things; first, *That the rending of Christ's body was the means of bringing us nigh to God*; next, *that the mysteries which had hitherto been hid in God were now*

^b Exod. xix. 18. Ps. xviii. 7.

^c Heb. xii. 26, 27.

fully revealed; and, lastly, that a new way of access to God was now opened for all people.

Christ speaks of his own body as being typified by the temple^d: and well he might do so, since “in him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” But as opening a way for our admission to the Divine presence, it was more particularly typified by *the veil*; the rending of which marked the violent nature of his death, and the blessed effects resulting from it. This is declared by an inspired Apostle, who, speaking of our having “a way consecrated for us through *the veil*,” adds, “*that is to say, his flesh.*” And this accords with innumerable assertions of Holy Writ, which declare that “Christ hath made peace for us by the blood of his cross,” and that, whereas we were once “alienated from God, and enemies to him in our minds by wicked works, he hath now reconciled us to him *in the body of his flesh through death*.”

Moreover, the mystical intent of all the types and figures was now exhibited in the clearest view. As the veil on the face of Moses intimated, that the Jews could not discern the end and reason of the ceremonial law, and “the taking away of that veil in Christ” enables us to “behold, as in a glass or mirror, the glory of the Lord;” so the rending of the veil shews us, that all the ends of the ceremonial law were fulfilled in Christ, and that to us is given the substance of what the Jewish Church possessed only in types and shadows. If we do not now comprehend the glorious designs of God in the work of Redemption, it is not because he has interposed a veil to hide them from us, but because we have a veil upon our own hearts, which we have not desired him to take away. It must be our fault, I say, and not his; for from that hour in which Christ died upon the cross, and especially from that hour when the Holy Spirit descended on the day of Pentecost, to reveal him unto men, “the face of the covering that had been cast over all people was destroyed, and the veil that had been spread over all nations was taken away^e.”

But that which was most fully and most immediately intended by the rending of the veil, was, to open for all people a free and personal access to God, that so they might obtain all his blessings for themselves, without the intervention of carnal sacrifices, and an earthly priesthood. To shew to men that no such access was allowed them under the law, was the *use and intent* of the veil^g; and to make that way open both to Jews and Gentiles, was the design of God in rending the veil^h. This further appears from the *time* when the veil was

^d John ii. 19, 21. ^e Col. i. 20—22. ^f Isai. xxv. 7, 8.

^g Heb. ix. 7, 8. “The Holy Ghost this signifying, &c.”

^h Heb. x. 19, 20. with Eph. iii. 18.

rent: for it was *at the time of the evening sacrifice*, when the priests were in the holy place, trimming the sacred lamps, and offering incense before the Lord. They, of course, must have beheld the interior of the sanctuary; and therefore had in themselves an evidence, that God had opened for them a new way of access unto his throne. This is called “a *new* and a *living* way;” *new*, because it never was revealed before; and *living*, because it would secure eternal life to all who should come in it; whereas, if even the high-priest himself had presumed to enter through the veil on any other than the day of atonement, or in any other manner than that prescribed by the law, he would have been struck dead upon the spot, or have been put to death as a presumptuous transgressor: but now every person in the universe may come to God, and find acceptance with him at his mercy-seat: if only he take the blood of his great Sacrifice, and bring it by faith to the throne of God, he shall find that there no longer exists any difference between “Jew and Greek, bond and free, male and female, but that we are all one in Christ Jesus¹.”]

Such is clearly the import of these phenomena: we now come,

II. To shew the improvement we should make of them—

Here we might suggest many things; but for brevity's sake we shall confine ourselves to two, which are particularly suggested by the holy Apostle. We should,

1. Receive and honour the dispensation which God has introduced—

[Consider the nature of that dispensation which preceded it; how dark, how unsatisfactory, how burthensome! — — — Compare with it the dispensation under which we live, a dispensation of light and liberty, of peace and joy — — — See the two contrasted by the Apostle^k; and then hear him declaring the abolition of the one, and the establishment of the other, and prescribing our duty in reference to that which we are privileged to enjoy¹: hear too the argument with which he enforces an obedient attention to it: He reminds us of the judgments which fell on Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, for refusing to comply with God's former appointments, which were carnal and earthly, and appeals to us respecting the impossibility of our escaping, if we disregard those which are spiritual and heavenly, since God, at this

¹ Gal. iii. 28. ^k Heb. xii. 18—24. ¹ Heb. xii. 25—29.

time, no less than formerly, is, to those who offend him, “a consuming fire^m.” Comply then with the commands of God, and “receive not the grace of God in vain.” Only remember wherein the main difference between the two dispensations consists: the one consisted altogether of forms and shadows; the other contains the substance: in the one, the sacrifices were beasts of the field, and the priests who offered them were guilty creatures like ourselves; in the other, CHRIST is our Sacrifice, and our great High Priest; and in his mediation and intercession must be all our salvation and all our hope. The earthquake shook the whole legal fabric, and removed it all, so that the Church is liberated from all its observances: in like manner must all *legal principles* be removed from us; and the freedom granted to the Church, must be realized in our hearts — — — In a word, we must be “new creatures in Christ Jesus: old things must pass away, and all things must become new.”]

2. Avail ourselves of the liberty which he has conferred upon us—

[God invites us all to come to him without fear: He says, “Draw nigh to me, and I will draw nigh to you” — — — But here is the difficulty. To be outward-court worshippers is easy enough: but to get within the veil, to approach God as seeing him that is invisible, to pour out our souls before him, to ask with a full assurance of obtaining whatsoever we stand in need of; to live in the habit of such intercourse with him as enables us to say, “Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ;” *this* requires continual watchfulness and unintermitted exertion. Yet this is the state to which we ought to aspire. The Apostle, after having, in a fore-cited passage, told us, that we have “boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an High Priest over the house of God;” adds, “Let us draw near with a true heart; in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience.” This is the glorious privilege to which we are brought. None need to stand at a distance: the golden sceptre is held out equally to all; and “we may ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us.” We are all, without exception, “a royal *priesthood*,” he who “hath loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, hath also made us kings and *priests* unto our God^o.” Let none then stand at a distance as unworthy to approach him, but let us go even to his throne, and “open our mouths wide that he may fill them” — — —]

^m Heb. xii. 29. ⁿ Heb. x. 19—22. ^o 1 Pet. ii. 9. Rev. i. 5, 6.

MCCCCXIII.

THE GUARDING OF THE SEPULCHRE.

Matt. xxvii. 62—66. *Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the Chief Priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way; make it as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.*

THE enmity of the human heart against God will never cease to operate, till the heart itself be changed by divine grace. One would have hoped that, when so many wonders had been wrought during the crucifixion of Christ, when the whole multitude that were spectators of it smote their breasts with grief, when the Centurion and others of the heathen soldiers were constrained to attest his innocence, and to proclaim him to be the Son of God, and, lastly, when they had seen some of their own body, even members of the supreme council, paying the most marked respect to his dead body, and committing it to the tomb with funeral honours; one would have hoped, I say, that the malice of the chief priests and Pharisees would have somewhat abated. But they were still restless: not content with having put him to death, and thereby destroyed, as they imagined, all his influence in the world, they pretended to fear that his Disciples would come and take him from the tomb, and spread abroad a report that he had risen from the dead. They certainly had no reasonable ground for such a fear: for, to what purpose could it be for the Disciples to carry on such a delusion, when they could not gain any thing by it but misery in this world, and destruction in the world to come? But the chief priests wanted to pluck up by the very roots this dangerous heresy, as they esteemed it; and to prove to all that Jesus

was an impostor. For this purpose they determined to secure the tomb, till the time of his predicted resurrection should be passed; and accordingly made their application to Pilate, for such assistance as they judged necessary.

Let us consider,

I. The precautions they used to secure the tomb—

[They remembered that Jesus had repeatedly foretold his resurrection on the third day: and they well knew, that, if the report of such an event should be circulated and credited, it would confirm his influence to such a degree that they should never be able to subvert it. They conceived that they had been guilty of a great error in suffering Jesus to live so long: and, if now they should leave it in the power of his Disciples to practise a deceit by stealing away the body, and affirming that he was risen, their “last error would be worse than the first.” They therefore, notwithstanding it was the Sabbath, went in a body to Pilate, to request that measures might instantly be taken to defeat any such plot: Yes, though they had often been filled with indignation against Jesus for performing acts of mercy on the Sabbath, they themselves felt no hesitation in violating the sanctity of it, in order to accomplish their malignant purposes.]

In their address to Pilate, they designate our adorable Lord as a “deceiver,” whose imposture they are determined to detect. They branded him with this ignominious name, well knowing the influence which such appellations have in influencing the decisions of timid or ungodly men.

Pilate acceded to their request, and gave orders that a guard of soldiers from the castle of Antonia should be at their disposal. These therefore they placed around the sepulchre: and, lest any collusion should exist between them also and the Disciples, they put a seal upon the stone that closed the sepulchre; and thus secured themselves equally against fraud and violence: the Disciples could not overcome an armed guard; nor could the guard connive at their taking away the body without being immediately discovered.]

Let us next consider,

II. The advantage derived from thence to the cause of Christ—

[Not all the Disciples together could have devised a plan that should render such benefit to their own cause as this did. It is true, that Christ's frequent appearances after his resurrection might remove all doubt from the minds of the Disciples; but still, if no precautions had been used to secure the tomb,

there would ever remain some plausibility in the assertion, that the Disciples had stolen away the body, and that some other man had personated him in his various appearances, and thereby deceived the multitude. But behold, the enemies of Christ themselves destroy all foundation for such a conceit: and the very means they used to subvert the religion of Christ, have established it on a basis that can never be shaken. By the placing of a guard, the Roman soldiers themselves became witnesses of his resurrection; they immediately declared the event to the chief priests and Pharisees, who gave them large sums of money to conceal the matter^a; and thus the priests themselves, even the whole Sanhedrim, became witnesses of the same. They were forced to invent some story to justify their continued rejection of Christ; but the idea of the whole guard (it is thought of sixty soldiers) being asleep at once, when the penalty of death was annexed to that offence, and the Disciples being able to remove the large stone from the door of the sepulchre, and to take away the body without so much as waking one of the soldiers, is too ridiculous to obtain the smallest degree of credit. That this should be done, too, and no one of the soldiers be called to an account for it, when their neglect had, on this supposition, defeated the most ardent wishes of the Jewish rulers, is inconceivable, especially when we know what was the state of the rulers' minds at that time.

Now we can easily conceive what would have been the effect, if Jesus had not risen, and the Jewish rulers had been able, at the expiration of the third day, to bring forth the body, and to shew it to the people: they would thus have proved indisputably that Jesus was an impostor, and would have destroyed in a moment all the influence of his name. But their defeat has established the truth of our religion beyond a possibility of contradiction: Yes, we desire no better evidences of its truth, than those which the Roman soldiers and the Jewish Sanhedrim have this unwittingly afforded us: so that we may well say, "Their last error was worse than the first:" for, if their forbearance gave Jesus an opportunity of propagating his religion, this device of theirs proved to demonstration the fact on which his religion rests; and has thereby precluded all excuse for their obstinate unbelief.]

We would now suggest,

III. Some general deductions from the subject—

Truly this is a triumphant subject to the Christian: for though we cannot but mourn at the idea that our blessed Lord should be treated with such indignities, we are constrained to triumph, when we see how

^a Matt. xxviii. 11—15.

all the efforts of his enemies were overruled for the manifestation of his glory. But there are two thoughts in particular which we would suggest as arising from this transaction:

1. How vain are the counsels of ungodly men!

[Doubtless the chief priests and Pharisees exulted in the hope that they had now attained complete success: but their devices were turned to their own confusion. It was thus throughout the whole history of our blessed Lord, and especially in the diversified events of his last hours: his enemies plotted together, and executed all their malignant purposes against him: but behold, in all that they did, they unwittingly “fulfilled the Scriptures^b” so that not one word of all the prophecies was left unaccomplished. In one sense they were *Satan’s* agents; for it was “he who put it into their hearts” to reject and crucify their Messiah: but in another sense, they were instruments in the hands of *God*, to execute the things which “his hand and his counsel had determined before to be done^c.” Thus also it has been with all who have conspired against the Lord in every age: he has invariably “disappointed the devices of the crafty,” and “taken the wise in their own craftiness^d.” Two objects his enemies always have in view; the one is, to injure his people, and the other is, to defeat his cause: but they are made, against their will, to advance the interests of both. In the history of Job we are informed, how Satan exerted himself in every possible way to ruin that holy man: but, after all his efforts, he only rendered Job the more exalted monument of grace, and augmented the happiness which he laboured to destroy^e. In like manner, the enemies of the Church have been uniformly baffled in all their attempts against it. They put to death that eminent disciple, Stephen; and raised a persecution against the whole Church, so that none, except the Apostles, dared any longer to continue at Jerusalem: but the effect of their persecution was, to destroy one preacher, and to raise up a thousand in his stead^f. At another time, having directed their hostility against the Apostle Paul, they prevailed so far as to get him confined in prison for two whole years. What a deadly blow must this, as we should think, have given to the Church! yet St. Paul himself tells us, that it “turned out rather to the furtherance of the Gospel;” since many in Cæsar’s palace, who would otherwise have never heard the word, were brought to the knowledge of it; and multitudes, when they saw his faith and patience, were stirred

^b Acts xiii. 27.

^c Acts iv. 25—28.

^d Job v. 12, 13.

^e Job xlii. 9, 10. with Jam. v. 11.

^f Acts viii. 1, 4.

up to tread in his steps, and “to preach the word without fear^g.” Thus it ever has been; and thus it ever shall be: for Solomon tells us, “There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord^h ;” on the contrary, how “many soever devices there may be in the hearts of men, the counsel of the Lord, and that only, shall standⁱ.” “The wrath of man shall praise him, and the remainder,” which would not subserve his purposes, “shall he restrain^k.”]

2. How happy are they who have God on their side!

[Whilst the Jewish rulers were plotting together for the utter subversion of Christianity, the Disciples were unconscious of their machinations, or overwhelmed with despair. But God is the friend of all his people, “an ever-present help in the time of trouble.” He is pleased to characterize himself by this very name, “The Saviour of them that trust in him^l.” He permits indeed his enemies to triumph for a season; but he warns them of the fearful issue of their conspiracies against him^m. As far as they prevail, they ascribe all their success to their own wisdom and power: but he reproves their folly, and visits upon them those very iniquities, which he has rendered subservient to the accomplishment of his own eternal counselsⁿ. As for his own people, he encourages them to put their trust in him, without suffering themselves to be alarmed at the menaces of their enemies, or harbouring any fears about their ultimate success^o. What their happy state should be, we see in the actual experience of David. He contemplates God in the character of an Almighty Protector^p; and, when urged by an alarmist to indulge desponding fears, he nobly replies, “The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord’s throne is in heaven^q.” He even appeals to the whole world, what cause he can have for fear, whilst he has such an Almighty Friend for his support^r. Such is the privilege of all his people: if “they believe in him, they shall not make haste through unbelieving fears^s: on the contrary, “their very thoughts shall be established^t.” In a word, they shall, though beset with enemies on every side, be preserved as in a royal pavilion, and have such an inward sense of the Divine presence as shall comfort them under every trouble, or rather screen them from trouble, and fill them with joy unspeakable and glorified^u.]

^g Phil. i. 12—14.

^h Prov. xxi. 30.

ⁱ Prov. xix. 21.

^k Ps. lxxvi. 10.

^l Ps. xvii. 7. Jer. xiv. 8.

^m Isai. viii. 7—10.

ⁿ Isai. x. 5—7, 12, 17.

^o Isai. viii. 12—14.

^p Ps. xviii. 2.

^q Ps. xi. 1—4. N. B. To the end of the third verse is the speech of the Alarmist.

^r Ps. xxvii. 1.

^s Isai. xxviii. 16.

^t Prov. xvi. 3.

^u Ps. xxxi. 20.

MCCCCXIV.

THE RESURRECTION.

Matt. xxviii. 6. *Come, see the place where the Lord lay.*

AMIDST all the indignities offered to our blessed Lord by the Jewish nation at large, some friends there were who sympathized with him, and desired to manifest towards him all the respect and love which their circumstances would admit of. He had now been put to death, and was committed to the tomb without any of those distinctions which were customarily attendant on an honourable interment. Some women, therefore, to whom he was dear, brought, very early after the Sabbath, spices, wherewith to embalm his sacred body. They knew not, indeed, how they should be able to execute their intentions; seeing that a great stone had been placed at the door of his sepulchre, to prevent any one from getting access to the body, to remove it. They came, however, to the sepulchre; and, to their great surprise, “saw the stone rolled away from the sepulchre, and an angel sitting upon it. The angel’s countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow.” At this sight, they were greatly alarmed: but the angel speedily composed their minds; saying, “Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, but is risen. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.”

Now, believing that you all desire to testify your respect to the Saviour this day^a, I would say to you, Come to the sepulchre, where he was deposited, and from whence he rose; “Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” Come, I say, and see there,

I. A witness for him—

Behold, that empty tomb witnesses to you, in most decisive terms,

1. The truth of his mission—

[On his resurrection had our blessed Lord rested the whole of his claims to credibility as the appointed Messiah. At the

^a *Easter-Day.*

very commencement of his ministry, he said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again^b." This was not understood at the time: but, by his enemies, it was brought against him as a charge at the close of his life; and, after his resurrection, it was recollected by his friends as a prediction of the event which had actually taken place. At another time, when urged by the unbelieving Pharisees to give them some greater sign than they had already seen, he told them, that "no other sign should be given them than that of the Prophet Jonas; for, as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so should the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth^c." On several other occasions, also, he spake of his resurrection as the destined evidence of his Messiahship^d: and this was the foundation of all the precautions that were used against an imposition which might be practised by his Disciples. It was feared that they might come by night and steal away the corpse, and then say that he was risen from the dead: and, to prevent it, the tomb was sealed with Pilate's seal, and guarded by a band of soldiers. This was a wise precaution: for, if the third day should pass away, and he be found in the grave, he would be proved an impostor at once; and all his influence would die away. But he rose at the appointed time, and thereby demonstrated that he was indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world. This is what St. Paul has plainly affirmed: "He was declared to be the Son of God with power, by his resurrection from the dead^e."

Come then, I say, and inspect the tomb; and learn from that, that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.]

2. The sufficiency of his mediation—

[The Lord Jesus undertook to expiate the guilt of a ruined world, and to redeem them to God by his blood. Under the sins of men he died. But who could be sure that his atonement had prevailed for the end for which it had been offered? He had mediated, it is true: but who could tell that his mediation had been accepted? How could that point be satisfactorily ascertained? His resurrection proved it beyond a doubt. If a man, who has undertaken, as a surety, to pay a debt, be liberated from prison, you conclude, of course, that he has fulfilled his engagement: his discharge is an evidence that the creditor has no further claim upon him. So, when we see him raised from the grave, to which he had been committed for the sins of men, no doubt can remain upon our minds but that he satisfied all the claims of law and justice in

^b John ii. 19.

^c Matt. xii. 38—40.

^d Luke xxiv. 6—8.

^e Rom. i. 4.

our behalf. The two goats which were offered on the day of atonement, and the two birds that were offered at the cleansing of the leper, exhibited this mystery in a striking point of view^f. The dying goat represented his death; and the scape-goat, which bore away the sins of all Israel, his resurrection. The living bird, too, that was dipped in the blood of the slain bird, and was let loose into the air, for the perfect cleansing of the leper, suggested the same blessed truth; that "Christ should die for our offences; but that he should rise again for our justification.^g" "Had he not risen, we had been yet in our sins^h;" but, seeing that "he hath both died and risen," we may defy all our enemies; and say with confidence, "Who is he that shall condemn meⁱ?"]

In this tomb, also, you may see,

II. A pledge to us—

Yes, verily, it is a pledge,

1. Of Christ's power to raise us to a spiritual life—

[The resurrection of Christ is set forth in the Scriptures as a pattern of that which is to be accomplished in all his followers; and by the very same power too, that effected that. In the Epistle to the Ephesians, St. Paul draws the parallel with a minuteness and accuracy that are truly astonishing. He prays for them, that they may know what is the exceeding greatness of God's power to us-ward who believe, *according to the working of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead*, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places^k." And then he says, concerning them, "God, who is rich in mercy, of his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, *hath quickened us together with Christ, and hath raised us up together*, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus^l." Here, I say, you see Christ dead, quickened, raised, and seated in glory; and his believing people quickened from their death in sins, and raised with him, and seated too with him in the highest heavens. The same thing is stated also, and the same parallel is drawn in the Epistle to the Romans; where it is said, "*We are buried with Christ by baptism into death; that, like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life^m*." But can this be effected in us? I answer, Behold the tomb! Who raised the Lord Jesus? He himself said, "I have power to lay down my life, and power to take it up againⁿ:" and he has further

^f Lev. xvi. 15—22. and xiv. 4—7.

^h 1 Cor. xv. 17.

ⁱ Eph. ii. 4, 5.

^g Rom. viii. 34.

^m Rom. vi. 4.

^g Rom. iv. 25.

^k Eph. i. 19, 20.

ⁿ John x. 18.

said, "Because I live, ye shall live also^o." We may be assured, therefore, that, "if we bear about in our body the dying of the Lord Jesus, the life also of Jesus shall be made manifest in our body^p:" if "we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: for as, in that he died, he died unto sin once; but, in that he liveth, he liveth unto God; so may we confidently reckon ourselves dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord^q." "Being planted in the likeness of his death, we are perfectly assured, that we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection^r."]

2. Of his determination to raise us to eternal life—

[Frequently did our Lord say, respecting his believing people, "I will raise them up at the last day^s." And, in raising up himself, he has given us a pledge that he will do so. For he did not rise as an individual person merely, but as the Head and Representative of all his people; as it is written, "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and is become the first-fruits of them that slept^t." The first-fruits, you know, sanctified and assured the whole harvest: and precisely so does his resurrection assure ours: for, "if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in us, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken our mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in us^u." Indeed this shall be effected by our Lord Jesus Christ himself: for, whilst he was yet upon earth, he declared, that "all who were in the graves should hear the voice of the Son of God, and should come forth; they that have done good, unto a resurrection of life: and they that have done evil to a resurrection of damnation^x."]

ADDRESS—

1. The unbelieving rejecter of the Gospel salvation—

[Thou dost not believe in Jesus, except as a prophet, a man like unto thyself; who died, indeed, as an example, to confirm his word; but never rose to carry on his work; nor is a Saviour to us any more than Moses himself was. Come, then, and inspect the tomb where he was interred: "Come, and see the place where the Lord lay." Tell me, Who removed him thence? Wilt thou adopt the story which the priests invented, and the soldiers were bribed to circulate, that the Disciples came by night and stole him away? What! were all the soldiers asleep, when the penalty of sleeping at their posts was death? And if they were asleep, how could they tell what was done? And how came it that Jesus, for the

^o John xii. 32.

^p 2 Cor. iv. 10.

^q Rom. vi. 8—11.

^r Rom. vi. 5.

^s John vi. 40, 54.

^t 1 Cor. xv. 20.

^u Rom. viii. 11. and 2 Cor. x. 14.

^x John v. 28, 29

space of forty days appeared to various Disciples, and at last ascended to heaven in the presence of five hundred brethren at once? Some of his Disciples, at least, were incredulous enough: Thomas would not believe unless he should put his hand into the print of the nails in his hands and in his feet, and thrust his hand into his side: How came he and all the rest to be persuaded? and how came they to attest the resurrection of Jesus at the peril of their lives, yea, and to lay down their lives in support of that testimony? If thou canst believe that these things were done in support of a direct falsehood, from which they themselves could derive no imaginary benefit, thou believest what is infinitely more incredible than the very fact which thou deniest. Thou mayest condemn credulity in others: but thou thyself art the most credulous of all thy fellows. Inspect the tomb of Jesus, and view it with any measure of candour, and thou canst no more doubt his resurrection than any other fact in the Bible: and, believing that, thou must believe all which either Prophets or Apostles have said concerning him.]

2. The humble seeker of a crucified Saviour—

[To thee I will say, as the angel did to the women, “Fear not thou, for thou seekest Jesus who was crucified.” The Roman soldiers, who guarded the tomb, had ground enough to fear. The earthquake might well appal them: and the bright angel strike them dead with terror. But nothing hast thou to fear: for the Saviour, even that “LORD, who lay” in the grave and is risen, is thy Friend, thy Forerunner, thine Advocate and Intercessor. He is gone “to appear in the presence of God for thee^y,” and has thereby given thee an assurance, that “he is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him^z”— — —

Moreover, when thou reflectest on the state to which he is risen, thou mayest well have comfort in the prospect of thine own death; for thou thyself shalt rise, like him, and partake of that very glory which he himself possesses. “If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that sleep in Jesus will God bring with him^a.” To thee, even the most violent death is but a sleep^b: and in the morning of the resurrection thou shalt awake, and “be caught up to meet thy Lord in the air: and then shalt thou be ever with the Lord.” Ye drooping saints, who are either lamenting the departure of others, or trembling at the prospect of your own, dry up your tears, and “comfort one another with these words^c”—]

^y Heb. ix. 24.

^z Heb. vii. 25.

^a 1 Thess. iv. 14.

^b Acts vii. 60.

^c 1 Thess. iv. 13—18.

MCCCCXV.

THE APOSTLES' COMMISSION.

Matt. xxviii. 18—20. *And Jesus came, and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost : teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you : and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*

THE Apostles spoke and wrote in a most authoritative manner. They issued commands, promises, and threats, in the name of God. We therefore naturally inquire, by what authority they acted. The passage before us gives a most satisfactory account.

In unfolding to you these words of our Lord, we will consider,

I. The commission which he gave to his Apostles—

This commission was very plain and express—

[Jesus, as God, possessed all power equally with the Father; but, as Mediator, he received his power from the Father. He received it, partly, that by means of it he might execute his mediatorial office^a; and, partly, as a reward for executing it^b. This power extended over heaven and earth. Less than this would not have sufficed for the ends for which it was given; but by this he is enabled to overrule every thing for the accomplishment of his own purpose. Nor is it at all diminished by the lapse of ages. It shall indeed cease to act at the last day^c: there will not then be any occasion for the exercise of it. But till all the members of the Church be glorified, Jesus will exert this power for their good; and his authority will be the hope and consolation of them all.

It was upon this that he founded the commission he gave to his Apostles. He had formerly sent them to instruct the Jews; he now extends their commission to the Gentiles.

They were to *teach* all nations. As they were to baptize men in the name of the sacred THREE, no doubt they were first to make known the persons and offices of the holy Trinity. They were to declare “the Father, as our offended, but reconciled, God and Father; they were to make known “the Son,” as the sinner’s advocate and propitiation; they were to

^a John xvii. 2.^b Phil. ii. 8—11.^c 1 Cor. xv. 28.

set forth “the Holy Ghost,” as the enlightener, comforter, and sanctifier of God’s elect.

They were to *baptize* their converts in the name of the sacred Three. Having proselyted men to the Christian faith, they were to initiate them into covenant with God by baptism. But though they first taught adults, and then baptized them, they reversed this order with respect to infants. They took care, however, that in all cases the doctrine they preached should be recorded in the baptismal rite; and that every Christian should either expressly or virtually acknowledge it.

They were also to *instruct* their hearers in *practical religion*. It is evident they were not to be *merely* moral preachers. They must of necessity insist much on the offices of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; but they were also to inculcate every moral duty, and to enforce every obligation, whether toward God or man.]

II. This commission being so arduous, he added a promise for their encouragement—

[The Apostles might well have been discouraged from attempting to execute so difficult a service. They were, in themselves, poor, mean, and illiterate: they had to propagate principles new, strange, detested: they had to oppose the lusts and prejudices of mankind: they had to bring men from sin to a life of holiness and self-denial; and this, not only without human aid, but in opposition to all the power and policy of the world. They could not therefore but feel themselves unfit for such a task: but our Lord gave them a most encouraging promise. When Moses declined the service to which he was called, God promised to be with him^d: thus Christ engaged to succour his Disciples in their work. He assured them of his presence to direct, assist, and uphold them; and to give effect to their labours. To this promise he called their particular attention, “lo!” nor will he fail to accomplish it to the end of the world. Nor was the affirmation added to it without peculiar energy. “Amen” may be considered as an affirmation or a petition: in either view it should not be overlooked. The promise it confirms, was the solace of all the Apostles; and has been the support of all succeeding pastors. Let every one then add “Amen,” as importing both his wish and affiance.]

Let us now mark,

III. The bearing which this commission has on us at the present day—

The Apostles were inspired of God to declare what

^d Exod. iv. 15.

no uninspired man could know; and were empowered by God to work miracles in confirmation of their word. In these respects ministers of the present day cannot for a moment be considered as on a par with them. But, so far as regards the message which we are to deliver,

We have the very same commission with them—

[The Lord Jesus Christ has had, in uninterrupted succession, servants to make known his name to all the different generations from the apostolic age to the present day: and all who have been called by him to the work of the ministry, have had the same message to deliver^e — — — In particular, we are to make known the offices of the sacred Three in the economy of redemption; setting forth *the Father* as the Fountain from whence it flows: (for it was from the love he bare to man that he gave us his only dear Son to save us^f;) and exhibiting *his Son*, his co-equal, co-eternal Son, as our Mediator, through whose obedience unto death our peace with God is obtained: and setting forth *the Holy Ghost* as the Agent, who applies to our souls all the blessings which Christ has purchased for us. *This mystery*, I say, *we are to unfold with all possible clearness and energy*: and we must insist upon it as the only foundation of a sinner's hope — — — At the same time we must require of men to obey the commands of God, and must admit of no other standard of holiness than that which God has given us in his word — — —

To address ourselves to this work in our own strength were folly and madness. But,]

We have also the very same encouragement as they—

[The Lord Jesus Christ will be with his Church and people “even to the end of the world:” and every faithful minister may expect from him all needful direction and support. He will “give testimony to the word of his grace^g,” and will clothe it with power divine, that it may effect that for which he has sent it^h. However weak in itself, it shall in his hands “be quick and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged swordⁱ.” It shall be as “a hammer or a fire that breaketh the rock in pieces^k.” In dependence on him therefore we go forth, expecting assuredly, that, notwithstanding the weakness of those who deliver it, “it shall be the power of God to the salvation of those who hear it^l.”

^e 2 Cor. v. 18—20.

^f John iii. 16.

^g Acts xiv. 3.

^h Isai. lv. 11.

ⁱ Heb. iv. 12.

^k Jer. xxiii. 29.

^l Rom. i. 16.

Were it not for this encouragement, no man, possessed of reason, would presume to undertake the office of a minister: but depending on Christ's promised aid, we do hope that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord^m."] ⁿ

^m 1 Cor. xv. 58.

ⁿ The APPLICATION of this subject must be suited to *the occasion* on which it is delivered. If it be an ORDINATION or VISITATION Sermon, the Address should be adapted to ministers. If it be *on a young minister's first entrance on his labours*, his hearers should be respectfully told what they are to expect throughout the whole of his ministrations; and be entreated both for his sake and their own to implore the Divine presence, without which he must preach in vain, and they hear in vain. If it be to PERSONS RECENTLY CONFIRMED, their "*baptismal*" vows must be particularly enforced, seeing that they have been *baptized into these principles, and these engagements*.

END OF VOL. XI.







